

AN INTERLUDE IN SPAIN

To
Georgette and the Children

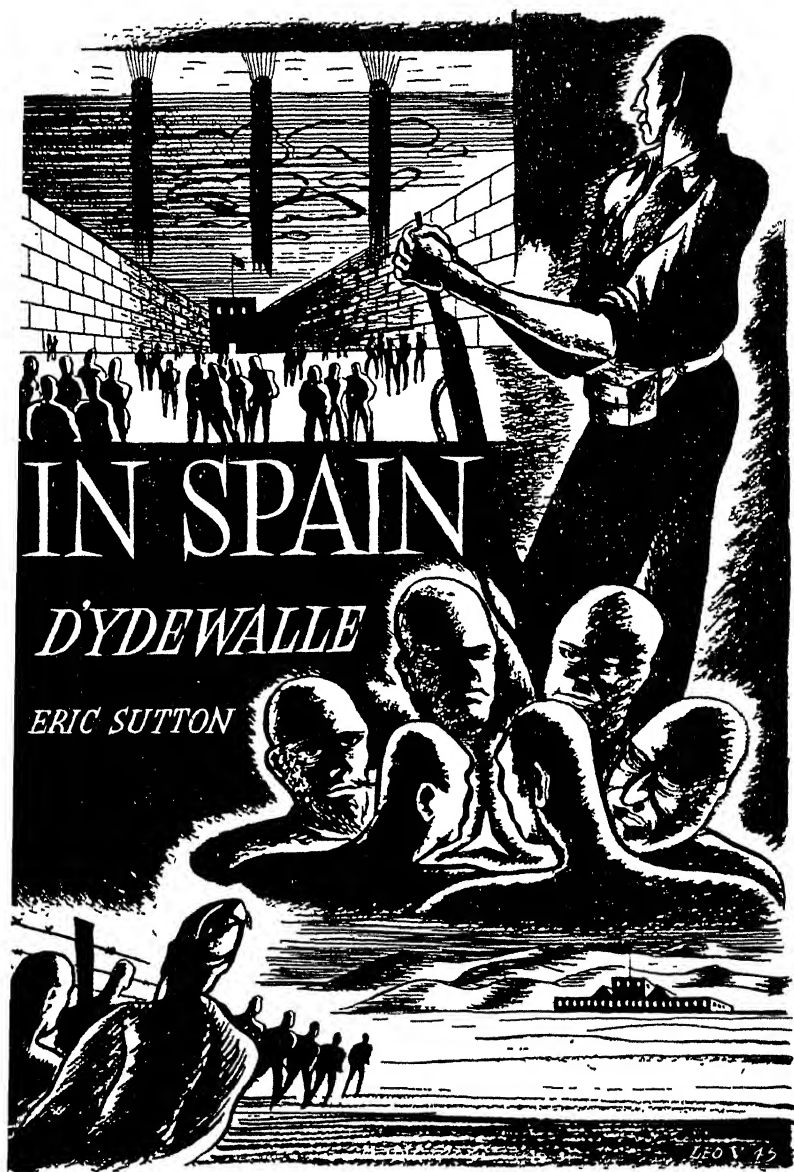


AN INTERLUDE

by CHARLES

Translated by

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By the same author

VINGT ANS D'EUROPE (Flammarion, Paris)

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"Of all these the boldest are the Belgians."

JULIUS CAESAR

AMONG so many men, of every age and walk of life, who faced the privations and the miseries of Spain during this war, I met with Poles, Dutchmen, Frenchmen, Serbians, all wanderers like myself, gathered together from the four points of the compass. I also knew a great many Belgians. Indeed at one time they formed the largest contingent in Miranda camp.

The reader will do me the justice to recognize, when he has read these pages, that I have written in no chauvinistic nor parochial spirit. This book might be the work of an Englishman, a Frenchman, or an American. It is therefore with the greater confidence that I claim, in favour of my Belgian brethren, a prize of honour. So intent they were upon rejoining the battle-fields of the United Nations, that there were none to equal them in ardour, in numbers, and in singleness of mind. Under the burden of suffering they displayed the noblest courage, and often too a gaiety beyond compare. In recalling all those whose good-humour I admired during those long months of prison, the words of Julius Caesar come back into my mind: "Of all these the boldest are the Belgians" (*Horum omnium fortissimi sunt Belgae*).

CHAPTER I

Was it a Mistake?

HAVE you ever known what it is sometimes to dream a bad dream? A matter of a few moments which seem longer than an eternity. In less than five minutes a panorama of events speeds across your vision. Then something, you know not what, a shock, a shiver, comes to tell you that it was not true, that none of it had happened. But suppose the dream lasts, and lasts a long while, eight minutes, for instance; and that the dream was a dream of Hell. An evil, smiling presence appears, touches you on the shoulder, and says: "Come." And gently, irresistibly, with infinite politeness, he escorts you to the kingdom of the dead. Not a word of explanation. Pray don't protest! Here you are, in Hell. To the keeper of the gate you say: "What have I done that I am here?" He smiles and answers: "It's no use talking; you are damned." Do not rub your eyes. Do not argue. Here you are, and damned. Doubtless, in the catacombs of life there must be tribunals that will recall you to the light. Don't appeal to them. Don't ask why you are here. You are no doubt innocent; you ought not to be here at all. Of course not. It is all a mistake. Try to extricate yourself, but do not harbour any vain illusions. Here you are, well and truly dead, and sentence passed upon you. Other dead men greet you, salute you, smile at you. They have been there a long while, since the beginning of the world. They talk with prodigious speed, and in a language that you do not understand. They suffer, sing, eat, sleep, and laugh, they revile each other, and they argue—oh, how they argue! They shed no tears. Strange it is, but the dead seldom weep, as though the tears that sometimes in days gone by used to burst forth from their hollow eyes, had dried up for ever. They welcome you kindly, with a sort of genial curiosity. The keepers of this place are as cadaverous as the inmates, but of a much more anguished air and aspect. That is because they too are damned, and, moreover, charged with the tutelage of all their fellow-damned. The common curse has laid upon them this added load of care. The exceptions are certain evil archangels, entitled

Officers, paid and placed in charge of the gates. Almost all, by some misdeed or other, have deserved this descent into the night. But you have not. You were a peaceable citizen of the kingdom of honest men, condemned by some miscarriage of events. Some filing clerk's error has got you into here. And you will get out again, since there is such a thing as divine justice. But when? Do not ask that question, I tell you. There has been a mistake.

Such was my lot during eight whole months, and many others endured it also. Very few had lived in such ignorance as mine, and entered prison in the same utter inexperience. None the less it was only in prison that some companion in misfortune made plain to them the extent of their dereliction and its cause. But I knew few who lived and endured captivity as easily as I did, and I carried myself as lightly when I arrived as when I left. As I stepped into my first cell I was as callow as a novice. When I emerged from my last, I was admirably fitted to become a Detective-Sergeant of Police.

It was November 17th, 1941. A Belgian agent from X—— was taking me to the Sagunto station at Barcelona. He talked a great deal. He was a dashing, rather boastful lad. Having come into Catalonia from France two days before, I regarded him as a good genius. He talked of Spain like Cervantes himself, and he provided for everything, my journey, my departure, my arrival at Lisbon, and even my guide, for I had as travelling companion and cicerone a Spanish republican. Gendarmes, *alguazils*, police-spies—all the pestilential myrmidons of the law would vanish at my approach. And, insisted my Belgian, in the very improbable event of my arrest, I should at most be sent to the camp at Miranda de Ebro in Old Castile, whence a vigilant lawyer could come and extricate me. With what compassion I thought of the unfortunates of Miranda, among whom I never imagined I should sojourn. I may as well admit it; there was a certain arrogance in my commiseration, of the sort that well-conducted students, on the eve of an examination for which they are thoroughly prepared, bestow on their fellows who have thrown away their precious time.

"Now then," said my Belgian friend; "there is your ticket for Sagunto. A third-class ticket. I apologize but the thirds, being more full up, aren't so carefully watched. In any case, as

I have said before, you have nothing to fear. And then, when you get to Lisbon, you'll see some of the big pots. Tell them what goes down in these parts and what doesn't. And above all tell them in London—tell the Ministers and the Generals. You've seen the job I'm doing here, and the sort of results I get. Dear old Charles, I'm relying on you; just work the oracle for all you know. . . . Well, remember me in your prayers. As a journalist, you've got a long arm. Don't forget your old pal of army days, the poor blighter.—Oh, there's your train. Hop on to it, and good luck. . . .”

I walked down the stairway to the station, which I knew only as the Sagunto station, opposite the Metro. One stairway in, and one stairway out. My guide was waiting on the platform, sitting on a bench, a stocky, round-faced little Catalan with a suitcase between his legs. How many before me had he escorted in this way, from train to tram, and from Metro to train, from Barcelona to the Portuguese frontier? A two days' and three nights' journey; and I began to grow tired of all its bustle and upheavals. As I sat beside my guide I pictured his interminable journeys from Paris to Marseilles, clandestine journeys, tedious journeys, in the comforting throng of those crowded corridors, where I had stood, worn-out but unobserved and safe. The lights twinkled in Sagunto station, red, green, yellow. A gentle lethargy came upon me. I had no responsibility of any kind. My sole duty was to obey my guide, to enter into no arguments and answer no questions. The guide was there to look after everything. I had merely to take care not to be asleep when the time came to get up and change trains. All quite simple. And then in three days' time Lisbon; and then—London. The lights of the station glowed red in the darkness like carnations in an Andalusian girl's hair. The train was a little late, eight or nine minutes late. An ill-dressed little man, with a four-days' beard, planted himself in front of me, and with the honeyed politeness of a bagman on the road, began his little story. I wondered if he was a tout for some prostitution agency, and I shook my head gently, wearily, just as I had done at the same hour a month ago outside the Café de la Paix, by way of disposing of such creatures of the night who stand and mutter “Special cinema, M'sieur. . . . Special cinema. . . .”

Suddenly my guide, my trusty guide, got up and moved away. Instinctively I did the same. Then my tiresome little bagman

waved a hand, and, as though by enchantment, here was a magnificent gendarme in a three-cornered hat, tall and young and rosy-faced, like a London policeman, but wearing a cocked hat and a cloak. And he began to talk. I replied that I had no need of a passport, indeed that it was better for me not to have a passport. I smiled. He smiled, too. And indeed there was much in the aspect of our colloquy that might well have been expressed in the formulae: "But I beg of you, my dear sir. . . . After you, my dear sir." It went on. I don't care for meaningless courtesies. The train came into the station. The guide had vanished.

The gendarme was going to make me lose my train. In a hotch-potch of Spanish-Catalan-French I made him understand my anxiety. He smiled a wry smile. The little ill-shaven scallywag was still standing by, writhing with nervous agitation. The train departed with the guide. What followed thereafter was without importance in my eyes. What did a gendarme or brothel-tout matter compared with the loss of a train? A man came along, well dressed this time, who showed me under the lapel of his coat the emblem of the Security Police. He talked French. What happened then is but dust in my recollection. In a room off the station bar, with pockets emptied, sitting at a table, I waited, vaguely worried; and what was going to happen to me I simply did not know. The Belgian official agencies had taken the utmost care to conceal from me the risks involved in this organization, perhaps with a sort of author's petty vanity, perhaps too to keep up the spirits of their clientele. The policemen, my hosts, displayed a positive virtuosity in their politeness, and I understood them now. No prisoner is so easy to deal with as he who does not know he is one. Like the deceived husband who knows nothing of his misfortune, he is thinking of other things. A train comes in marked Madrid, and I am ushered into it. Am I to be taken to Madrid? I offer American cigarettes to my escort, who talk more charmingly than ever. I was seized by a grinding curiosity. No doubt I was to be taken to some prison? They laughed and protested. At that moment the train stopped. It had simply changed stations, and this was its terminus: the station for France. Two gendarmes put me between them, and assured me that I should soon be in Gibraltar. I walked on and on with a sense of growing lassitude, under a translucent sky, in the light of a full moon. Nothing in

my heart but the sense that I was the sport of a malicious fate. In my mind, weariness was certainly overtaking curiosity. No anger, only a feeling of exhaustion. Nearly two hours had passed since this little comedy had begun.

I risked a question.

"Shall I soon know where I am to be taken?"

"Yes, you will be told."

"But when?"

"*Mañana*" ("To-morrow.")

I offered the gendarmes an American cigarette. They each took one and cut it in half. Then, with infinite dexterity, they rolled a fresh cigarette with each half, and said: "*Muchas gracias.*"

A last door opened, in an immense façade. I read the words: "Prefecture of Police." The two gendarmes in cocked hats left me, visibly much impressed by my good manners. In Spain, no doubt, undesirable characters usually give more trouble on their way to gaol. Two other gendarmes, with no less courtesy, led me to a staircase. Doubtless I was to be interrogated before being taken to the camp at Miranda, that famous concentration camp where I should languish for two or three weeks, perhaps, a prospect which I already contemplated with horror. A fortnight lost, three weeks lost, in the middle of the war, alas. A grating slid gently aside and I entered an ill-lit subterranean corridor. Why were they so insistently taking me all round the establishment? Good Lord, what was this! A row of barred doors. One of the barred doors opened. The gendarme told me to go in. I stopped on the threshold. There must surely be some mistake, the cell was crammed with men, all seated. Impossible to set foot inside it. I turned back with a laugh. The gendarme, singular man, insisted. Once more a doubt came over me, for the space of a few seconds, just so long as the wind takes to puff away a tuft of thistledown. I groped my way into the shadows, with an "Excuse me, gentlemen." A last look at the gendarme, a look that meant "Surely this joke has lasted long enough." The heavy, barred door creaked and closed. The man in the cocked hat smiled a last smile. Decidedly, I said to myself, some aberration on the part of Fate.

The aberration lasted for eight months.

I have come to think that the best training for the soldier is

that of the acrobat. Would-be parachutists have to undergo all the exercises of the circus. The idea is that, physically and morally, he shall have experienced all the ordeals of the gymnasiarch on his apparatus. The modern soldier, like the mariner of sailing-ship days, must be familiar with every trick of the trapeze. He must sleep on the ground, eat with his fingers, walk on his hands : indeed, more simply stated, he must be able to go without eating, drinking, or washing for many hours on end. Then only, if he be truly a man, he will say with astonishment : " Was I really up to all this ? I did not know it was so easy."

It was thus with the infantrymen of 1914, through the first winter of the trenches. The spring found them astonished by their endurance. Since 1940, hundreds of young Belgians have suffered all that must be suffered in the prisons of Spain. Some were held for a week, some for a month, or four months, or eight months. After which, the authorities, satisfied at last, sent them on to the camp at Miranda de Ebro in Old Castile. There,—another bludgeon-blow. Some spent two years there ; others two months. I don't believe that their odysseys served the interests of Spain, as I shall explain later on. For a long while, Poles, Belgians, Dutchmen, and Frenchmen will go about recounting the barbarisms of Franco's Spain, and it will be a long time, alas, before their tales are forgotten.

Once through the grated door, which closed behind me, I said again, " I beg your pardon, gentlemen." There was room in that little cell for two men lying full length. Two low stone benches, in a room about as large as a first-class railway compartment. There were eleven of us inside it, and nearly all tall men. The ten already established observed me with intense curiosity. I learned afterwards that being a man of large proportions they took me for an official. When I had sat down in a corner they could see me for what I was, just as I could see them too. A small lamp, poised like an emergency lamp in a railway carriage just above the door, shed a dim light over the room. And then a strange thing happened.

On my right was sitting, with an air of bewilderment, an old College friend of mine, and further off an airman officer with whom I had dined in Paris a month before. Then there were some young men whose mere accent betrayed their Belgian origin. Last of all a jovial high-coloured youth dozed by the side of a man of fifty or so, of a marked Semitic type. He had

the air of a respectable member of the Israelitish middle-class. The high-coloured personage was the test pilot, Lefevre. The well-dressed Jewish gentleman was the Parisian café-singer Pierre Dac, of the Red Moon, manager of the Marrow Bone. The jest was becoming prodigiously interesting. Three English soldiers completed the tale.

The conversation was passably animated. We introduced each other. We sang songs. Only Pierre Dac, the master-clown, did not sing. He contented himself with laughing heartily at other people's jokes. Some of us, growing very weary, tried to lie down. It was impossible: much better to make do without sleep. Towards six o'clock in the morning, exhaustion overcame discomfort, and many of us went to sleep, seated on the stone floor. I sank into a sort of coma.

An affectionate sympathy already united me to my new companions, the young Belgians, the College lads, whom I loved like brothers,—or like sons, I was not sure which. I was able to sleep anywhere, and I liked my companions. I was indeed a prisoner.

Four days and four nights. The uncertainty in that lightless cell lasted four days and four nights. Once only we were summoned one by one and escorted to an office to have our finger-prints taken on cards, and to be photographed, also one by one.

We asked the polite officials who interrogated us:

"Shall we soon be going to Miranda?"

"You will be told."

"No doubt, but when?"

"*Mañana.*"

At last some gendarmes took charge of us, and bundled us into prison vans with a number of youthful malefactors. It was eleven o'clock in the evening. We had to keep a close watch on our pockets. Where was the van taking us? Doubtless to the station for Miranda, the famous concentration camp. Standing up, leaning against the barred door, all I was conscious of was the irresistible sense of curiosity which took possession of me once again. On we went. At each turn I was flung violently on one side with all my weight on to two or three young ruffians who burst into the foulest curses. It wasn't long since the idea of merely treading on the toe of a respectably dressed gentleman would have filled me with distress: and

here I was crashing into human beings as though they had been a pile of bolsters without the slightest feeling of uneasiness. I was dirty, unshaven, and my hair unbrushed. Little I cared. It was war, and all sorts of things were happening, though I was hardly a willing witness.

Never had the Carcel Modelo of Barcelona received lighter-hearted inmates than my friends and myself.

The first morning was quiet. At ten o'clock, in single file, we went out on the exercise-ground, the *patio*, an imposing triangular enclosure with walls fifty yards long. Two buildings and an exterior wall, the latter being reinforced by another wall five yards high. Beyond lay the city; Spain, light, liberty, and life. Other prisoners joined our company. We introduced ourselves. Men of many nations, Belgians, English, and especially Poles. The first question was of course: "How long are we here for?"

And the older inhabitants answered: "Three weeks, perhaps a month. . . ."

CHAPTER 2

There was No Mistake

MY situation now began to fill me with horror. For the first time I felt really miserable. A busy man like myself,—here was a sorry fate to rob me of such momentous weeks. Worse still, it was then November 21st. Were we to spend Christmas in this penitentiary? I firmly put aside the depressing thought. And yet for an instant I was overcome with self-pity. It always happens so, as I have often observed since; distress of mind is accompanied by a bitter regret for those we love, a yearning for those near to us that casts us utterly down. Just as we barely miss our loved ones when the wind of victory lifts our wings, so does our spirit reach out to them when disaster or ill-fortune has laid us low. I marked with anguish every detail of the *patio*. Orderlies, themselves prisoners, brought us sweetmeats and tins of preserves in great wooden trays. This was the *Economato*, an excellently organized service. Others sold

oranges. They came bearing painted wooden baskets, overflowing with golden fruits, crying: "*Naranjas*." All the sunshine of Valencia brimmed from their white, slatted crates. Kneeling in the sand over their scales, they weighed out the resplendent fruit. It was a clear bright day. I had a few pence left. So I sat against a wall, in a patch of sunshine, savouring my oranges. Until then I had been likening myself to an unhappy boy who has just been shut into some depressing school and is saying to himself: "What have I done to deserve this?" Now I remembered the Italian beggars who spend the day thus on a *lira*, spitting out the pips. I lit my last American cigarette, a Lucky Strike. When it was nearly finished, a sort of street-loafer, like myself, came up to me and began to talk, and then another, a man of Marseilles, in blue dungarees, a real slum type with a horrible weasel face. Mechanically, with a flick of my finger, I jerked the cigarette-end on to the ground a few paces away. My two companions leapt at it. The Marseillais, the more cunning of the pair, had been watching my movements, and was on to it in a flash. The other got up, dropping his arms like a gambler who has lost his stake. The first sat down beside me, carefully extinguished the cigarette-end and slipped it into his pocket. His defeated adversary marched off without apparent rancour. I had spent my last *peseta*, eaten my last orange, smoked my last cigarette. I felt perfectly serene. The sun was comfortingly warm. This condition lasted until the end of exercise-time. But, though I did not realize it, I was not content. I was not hungry, I was not thirsty, I felt no need to smoke. What was it that was lacking? Work, no doubt. Boredom stole upon me. . . .

Back in my cell it took possession of me again. That first day was passed in the assignment of cells. I got No. 455, in the Fifth Gallery, with two young Belgians, and a tall, hard-bitten, tattooed Frenchman of the Legion. He had lived there, on a mattress, for six months, without respite of any kind; no clothes but the regulation prison dress and a grey cotton bonnet. A typical convict of the labour battalions. He never went out into the *patio*. He was too ashamed of his prison garb. He slouched back and forward in his eighteen-foot-by-nine cell, on slippered feet, with his hands in his pockets, six paces from right to left, six paces from left to right, his stiff red hair brushing against the ceiling. A veritable menagerie lion,

padding noiselessly to and fro. For the rest, a kindly giant, whom I shall have occasion to speak of later. Seated on the shining paved floor, with my hands in my pockets, I watched him undisturbed. At midday soup was brought. I had no pots or pans, and an empty herring-box had to serve my table needs. The soup, which was made mainly of sweet potatoes, revolted me, and I presented it to my red-headed cell-mate, Robert, who took it readily. He lay full length on his mattress, and I on the floor, and we both of us slid without effort into the slumber that brings the sole and ultimate remedy for boredom.

CHAPTER 3

First Day in Gaol

At five o'clock something very curious happened. The warders opened the cell doors and a concert began, a very good concert too. I had indeed read in newspapers about prison concerts and entertainments. How often had humanitarian penal theorists been derided for such an innovation. Now, a prisoner myself, I enjoyed them thoroughly. I could listen undisturbed. Robert was quiet and considerate. The young Belgian, with the utmost tact, understood my need of relaxation. It was an hour of delight, and it brought me peace. At the end of the concert the gallery was thronged with people. All the prisoners lined up four deep in column formation, like the start of a procession, facing the central rotunda. Then began a ludicrous ceremony. They sang the national anthems, Spanish, Falangist, and Carlist, with arms outstretched, like veritable Falangists. Everybody knew that, being what they were, they none of them believed a word of what they sang, that the whole gallery was solely inhabited by political prisoners. At the end, an invisible conductor shouted: "Franco, Franco, Franco," and every man of us chanted in unison that cry of joy and victory. Then—a crowning touch—the conductor played a final fanfare, and the following dialogue ensued:

"*España.*"

"*Una.*"

"*España.*"

"*Grande.*"

"*España.*"

"*Libre.*"

The leader, like a herald at arms, as he uttered the word "*España*," dwelt heavily on the first syllable, almost detaching it from the rest—"Es . . . *paña*." The two last syllables cracked out like rifle shots. He continued: "*Arriba España*" (Long live Spain); and the massed column responded, in soul-stirring unison: "*Arriba.*"

At that moment a bugle blared out three shrill calls. As one man the enormous column swung in a quarter-turn to right. A last bugle-call . . . and the prisoners, quietly falling out of rank, returned to their cells. It was six o'clock, a faint violet light from the November sun filtered through the barred windows. This time recollection became almost a hallucination. I was in a convent. The door opened. Some fruit and vegetables were brought in, a present from the Consulate: oranges, figs, onions, salt, and tomatoes. I made the vegetables into a salad. Then I lay down, rolled in my overcoat, and ate the fruit. Now I remembered, with incredible precision. It was thirty years ago, my first night in my school dormitory. My parents kissed me and said: "You'll get used to it. Here's a parcel of oranges and figs. Keep them in your cubicle, and you can eat some in the evening before you go to sleep, after prayers in chapel."

The taste of figs, the taste of oranges, the light glimmering on the ceiling, the fantastic shadows sketched by the lamplight on the walls—all this made up a scene of very long ago, of old days that had been good days indeed. In his corner, Robert, the old lag, rolled in his blanket, lay fast asleep. He often slept to warm himself, for he had nothing to keep him in heart but his rags and his soup. His blanket was his fireside.

At nine o'clock the light was turned off. I remembered the good old times at school, and visitors who asked: "Have you got used to it yet? Try to get used to it as soon as you can. . . ."

It was my fifth night on the floor. I found it impossible to lie on my side for long: so I arranged myself on my back with my head on a little bag, and fell asleep without any trouble. I had got used to it.

Opposite us were housed the prisoners condemned to death. Behind them, in the other gallery, separated from ours by the yard, or *patio*, were the lunatics. All night one of them shouted and sang. He had been a tenor at the opera. To get a sight of him you had to pull yourself up to the unglazed, grated window. Yonder was a population different from ours. At recreation hours, a huge throng stood lined up in the yard with their backs to the wall, awaiting a trumpet-blast. It sounded four times, and all the prisoners raised their arms, Roman-fashion, in silence. A final blast from the trumpet, one only: "Franco!" they all shouted and scattered joyfully, as though the invisible Emperor had suddenly ordered their chains to be struck off. It was just like a *leit-motiv* in an opera: "Franco" punctuating the passage of the day, like shouts of "*Ave Caesar*." Then the lunatics came and went. Their recreation times did not coincide with ours: I could watch the movement of the crowd on the white ceiling of my cell, by merely lying on my back. Their shadow procession slid across that white screen, like a crowd of strikers on a newsreel. The lunatics yelled—yelled interminably, emitting sounds devoid of sense. They were, it seemed, kept in bondage for some while, because too many of them were people who had feigned madness to find refuge. They fancied that a refuge of that kind was better than a gaol. And so the lunatics stayed a long time in prison. There were some real lunatics, who could be recognized by their tense febrile hands and vacant eyes. They lived next door to the *Maricones*, the little lads who dress like women, paint their faces, and so walk the streets: a very frequent diversion in the Mediterranean ports, especially Cadiz, but forbidden in prison. However, these young dames did their best by plucking their eyebrows and painting others in their place. Thus, despite the obligatory prison hair-cut, they still managed to rouge their faces, simper and attitudinize, walk arm in arm, and dance around, for all the world like flappers at a boarding school. "I was so glad to see you quite well again yesterday evening . . ." said one coquettishly. "You quite upset me, you naughty girl," twittered another.

They called each other by their *Maricones* names, women's names, Carmencita, Dolores, Lola. And they had their parcels addressed to them by these names. Everybody laughed, but no one could do anything about it.

But during most of my time there I saw little of the *Maricones* and the lunatics ; I became better acquainted with those condemned to death. And indeed I was housed appropriately enough in a great grey building with black barred windows and white ceilings, companioned by black-haired, grey-faced men, in a grey-painted cell. But the paint was parched and cracked and leprous. On the ceiling the solitary light, unshaded, threw surrealist rays on to the white ceiling. Sometimes, at night, the lunatics would launch into lamentations, punctuated by agonized shrieks. I remember one night of the blackest rain. It poured in torrents. I could hear from a near-by steeple the slow procession of the hours. The rain came down more savagely than ever, with the hiss of a jet from a hose. It deadened the lunatics' cries, until nothing was audible but the clatter of that rain. Then it stopped quite suddenly. And the lunatics again began their chant. Symphony in black and white ; black rays, white rays. I was living in a Dürer woodcut ; on my one side, Madness, on my other, Death.

On Wednesdays and Fridays, about eight in the morning, a warder came in and shouted : "*Barbiero !*" It was the barber's hour. Razors being forbidden, as were all cutting and striking implements, everyone went to the barber's shop, in Indian file, and a very gay and spruce little establishment it was. Spaniards, like Italians, are amateurs of *peluquerias* just as they are of boot-blacks. Ragged they may be, they must have their hair perfumed and their boots polished to a mirror-like glaze. At the barber's in the Carcel Modelo, we could talk, sit in arm-chairs, smoke, and above all look in the glass, an operation which was impossible in our cells, since the most innocent mirrors had been removed. Besides, we went and came back upright, in the manner of bipeds ; while in the cells, life was lived on all-fours. In the dungeons of the Prefecture, it was conducted prone upon the floor. Best of all, we could exchange news. All the talk was of Odessa, Sebastopol, London, and Vichy. It was the first meeting-place of the day. The barbers, prisoners themselves, did their work in proper style, and would take no tips. We offered them cigarettes, which they accepted ceremoniously, like gentlemen, expressing pious wishes for a speedy victory of the Allies, and a better "Europe."

Only the condemned men did not visit the barber's shop. They were shaved with a clipper. A gash in the jugular is

easily made, and Franco did not want the Carcel Modelo turned into a slaughter-house.

On Saturdays only, at four in the afternoon, my hair was cut. It was done rapidly and without noise. I neglected to offer the operator a cigarette. He asked me for one. I refused it, like a Merovingian king, who as victim of a *coup d'état* thinks he no longer owes anything to any man. I had to wait until the following Wednesday to be able to look at myself in the glass. On that day I understood the profound significance of the epic of Samson. I lay powerless behind the bars.

With the barber came another small indulgence, the *limpia-botas*: the bootblack, a hawk-nosed Indian, yellow-hued, with jet-black hair, black hands, black nails, and a solitary tooth as yellow as a caramel and as long as a tusk. When he laughed he exposed a gaping gulf of mouth, and a violet tongue. Black-clothed, black-booted, a veritable advertisement for his blacking-box, he made his way from gallery to gallery with box and rags and brushes. The prison was his domain, and he was particularly interested in the foreign prisoners, who had the strange habit of wearing boots instead of shoes or sandals. As we passed in Indian file, the genuine Indian grimaced behind the gallery bars. He needed a plume of feathers to give him a finishing touch.

He was certainly the happiest of the citizens of the Carcel Modelo, for he was doing business, like Popai. Popai was not a prisoner, he stayed in prison because he liked it. This toothless old personage arrayed himself in his Sunday best on Sunday. In the city he would have been a creature of the gutter. In the Carcel Modelo he was a personage. He stayed there because such was his pleasure. Popai swept up the hair-trimmings from the floor in the barber's shop, put them into a bucket and consigned them to a destination unknown. Then, in the same bucket, he collected the dirty linen and washed it. Finally, still in the same receptacle, he carried round rolls of bread, which he disposed of on a lucrative black market. A very busy man. His daily earnings must have been at least ten *pesetas*. He was always smiling. No expenses. No taxes. A grand life, always certain of a mattress, dry in summer, damp in winter, in an underground cellar.

After twelve days I acquired a mattress, free from vermin and stuffed with raffia. I knew the Governor, Don José, a

sort of clean-shaven Philip II, with magnificent jet-black hair and prominent cheek-bones. I knew the sacristan, a young ruffian with a face like a figure on a Chinese screen, once the most precocious young highway robber in all Spain. At fourteen he had killed his man and been condemned to death. In view of his age he was reprieved. At eighteen he was a sacristan, and a veteran of crime. He was to be seen on his way from the chapel to the vestry, always singing to himself, and sliding down the staircase balustrades. I knew the crier, a black gnome with an enormous mouth. Each gallery had its accredited crier. He could be often heard shouting: "*Los que se curan de las piernas . . . al botiquin*" ("All who have anything the matter with their legs, go to the chemist's shop"). And those whose legs were painful or swollen formed up in line. They were curiously numerous. The crier himself knew something about such troubles. He had only two half feet left, two lumps of flesh. The rest of them had been frozen at Teruel, and had there remained. He walked, like a Chinaman, on the arches of his insteps.

No one ever wept, nor talked of his misfortunes. Politics absorbed our conversation. Often, indeed almost every day, came a trumpet sound, a long, low-pitched, melancholy call. Everyone was silent, and then was heard the tinkle of a bell passing along the gallery. It was the Holy Sacrament, which the Chaplain was carrying to a dying man. "There's another popping off," said Robert, "fed up, I suppose." And the Belgians, cycle-racers to a man, would echo: "Another fellow dropping out."

A few moments later the little bell came back. Again the bugle sounded that heartrending call, like the Last Post of the English army.

The sick man almost always died during the day, in the infirmary. We were never officially informed, but we easily found out.

Thus indeed we found out many things.

In general we were never ill-treated or abused. Every morning the Mongol opened the door, after coffee, and shouted: "*Enfermos?*" ("Anyone ill?").

And we answered: "No."

Some of us might have a touch of influenza, or an attack of angina, and the infirmary orderly came to see them. He was

an ex-Communist, a motor-driver, a fine and kindly young fellow, much interested in the problem of the King of the Belgians. He did his best for us, with his scanty medical supplies, but he would comfort the sick by prophesying speedy English victories. Then he gave them a little tobacco and cigarette-paper, and promised to come back next day.

"*Mañana.*"

CHAPTER 4

A Model Prison

THE Model Prison dates from about 1910, and, like all Spain of that time, was redolent of opulence and ease. No doubt the Spaniards of the epoch before 1914 allowed themselves a few sporadic revolutions, a few rifle-shots in the Montjuich moat. But they were cheap enough, and the regency of Maria-Christina, like the opening years of Alfonso XIII, had been marked by nothing more than a few passing explosions. Seven hundred inmates sufficed to fill the Model Prison, which was itself divided into seven galleries each containing a hundred cells, numbered from one to a hundred. In the blessed time of Primo de Rivera a good half of the prisons of Spain were empty. The Spaniards eyed each other with vague disquiet: surely some facetious demon had metamorphosed the Spain they knew. The paradox of Primo lasted six years and a few months, at the close of which Alfonso XIII himself, quite oblivious of what he was about, dismissed him. Then, at the instance of Sanjurjo's military government, Don Alfonso himself departed, to avoid "shedding Spanish blood." So exalted a solicitude did not meet with its reward. The morrow of Alfonso XIII's fall opened, for Spain, an era of monstrous and appalling slaughter, in which Catalonia of course led the way. Never again was the Model Prison less than full. At one time the warders became prisoners; at another the prisoners assumed the rôle of warders. But the cells were never untenanted. When I was there in 1940, the seven hundred cells contained rather over eight thousand prisoners. I hasten to add that, during the following months,

the total continued to diminish, for the numbers of those discharged increased, and the sum of those shot, five or six a week, was steadily maintained. Extermination, as everyone knows, is the most expeditious means of settling a quarrel; it is also the most certain method of emptying a prison.

The seven galleries of the Model Prison were the seven rays of a single star. At its centre was the office from which the Governor could survey his entire domain. His vision reached to the far end of each and every ray. First he saw a barred gate, and then a vast, bare, chill corridor, thirty feet broad. On his left, three stories of cells. On the right, exactly facing them, three other stories of cells. The underground ones alone lay outside his compass, which is why the underground ones were much in request, and many prisoners competed for a lodging there. This seemed to ease the horrible congestion in the other cells, which was indeed a symbol of those times. In 1941-2 the average number of inmates to a cell was eight or ten, whereas in the reign of Alfonso XIII criminals used to complain bitterly of solitude. Every cell was provided with a door, except in the first gallery, where that encumbrance had been torn off by the prisoners of 1936. Only the hinges remained. During the whole of the civil war this deficiency had been tolerated by the Republican authorities, and Franco's government had inherited the tradition. In that same period, a Red warder had been seized and dragged feet foremost down the stairways. At the end of that journey his skull was no more than a mass of bleeding pulp. By way of retaliation, there had been a riot, after the abortive *coup d'état* of 1936, when the Caudillo, more fortunate at Seville and Burgos, failed at Madrid and Barcelona. Then the prisoners had won their liberty with the aid of machine-guns, but one blinded warder had survived. I knew one inmate who still wore the blue tunic and trousers of the warders of those days. He had changed his job, but not his domicile. Master or man, little it signified, so that he did not leave the vast and monstrous edifice in which this population, lived, suffered, and died. In women's prisons there are births, among the newcomers, and deaths; among the men there are only deaths, and many deaths there were. Never, before my sojourn in that place, had I seen so many dying men. And of these men I must tell the tale. The foreigners lived in the first gallery on the right. Those condemned to death were lodged on the left,

exactly facing us. They, among these eight thousand human beings, were the most admired and observed of all. And if their total, an average of twenty to thirty, was diminished each week by five or six units, shot or strangled, new recruits always came to make the total up.

There were no arrangements to mitigate the horror of their condition. Here were housed all those condemned to death for political crimes. Here they awaited the order of reprieve, with commutation of sentence to thirty years' detention, and transfer to another gallery. If the order was not signed, death came quickly, without preliminary warning. Death said, "Mañana," like everybody else. Months passed in expectation and vague hope, while the victim counted out his days, ate, slept, smoked, listened to concerts from five to six, read newspaper feuilletons, played *Pelota* in the *patio*, and calculated chances—up to the very last chance of all. Some waited eight months . . . but death came all the same.

At six o'clock in the morning a faint stir of life began in the vast entrance hall. It was the sweepers, wheeling bins of sand, who set about the building's morning toilet. The dull thud of their brooms could be heard against the doors. Outstretched on the floor, or on my mattress, I listened to them with closed eyes, evoking the noises of the Paris streets when the drawn curtains still hide from us in winter the bleak glimmers of the dawn. At seven a bugler in the rotunda blew a few preparatory notes. Then a sudden blast rent the night, shattered the darkness, blared out the reveille, which echoed into the furthest corners of the vast edifice. The bolts shot back into their sockets. It was the first return to reality, the emergence from the dark limbo of sleep. Electricity brought the light sharply back, we measured the extent of misery renewed, of a new day to be endured, as mortally tedious as those that had gone before. The doors crashed open, and three men with diabolic faces entered, leaning over a tureen of noisome inky fluid known as coffee. They were Ramirez, a white-haired Catalan, incredibly short-sighted: little San Elias, with his Mongol head, slitted eyes, straggling matted hair, yellow complexion, staring cheekbones, and pointed teeth, his face cleft by a pitiful bewildered smile: and the black-browed Thoma, who vanished one day, —released. "Coffee!" they cried. But it was the half-wit Ramirez who presided over the proceedings, smoking his first

cigarette, more bilious than ever, his neck huddled into a canvas towel. The two others were content to do their work and the Mongol with his grimly rhythmic motion suggested a coolie on the banks of some infernal river, a black shadow plunging his ladle into waters darker still.

The door closed again, with a click-click of the bolt. Mostly we managed to stop it in time. A few cigarettes had sufficed to win us the good graces of the warders, who gladly shut their eyes. One of us only had got up to take the coffee. On the evening before he had set the pile of dishes in a row beside his mattress, and sacrificed himself for all the rest. These small services are quickly organized among prisoners. Three-quarters of an hour later the doors opened with much ceremony, and an officer stepped in briskly with a warder at his heels. It was the hour of roll-call. The officer flung a glance into the interior of the cell, and the warder barked out a total, the number of the inmates,—eight, six, nine, as the case might be, but so quickly that the ceremony lasted barely a few seconds. One of the officers even owed his nickname to his special rapidity. An amazingly thin man, and markedly aloof, he regarded us with little interest, especially at that hour of the morning, when he was just out of bed. Poor man, he was sleepy, and under the open collar of his tunic, slipped on in a hurry, could be seen his pyjama-jacket. He passed Nos. 542, 543, 545, reached the end of the gallery and swung back. Then came the turn of our neighbours opposite, those condemned to death. First the warders' cell, the *ordonnancias*, then the cell of those sentenced to be strangled, the felons and murderers of peace-time; of these there were not many, and they were kept under special surveillance. Lastly, those condemned to death for political crimes. For them the roll-call was rather more meticulous, as their number had sometimes been reduced early that same morning, between three o'clock and half-past three. That, however, was another story. But for the officer on duty there was not much chance of making a mistake. At the door of the cell lay a mattress, a little heap of dirty clothes, and a few scraps of food. Which was all that remained of last night's prisoner—some straw, and a few rags.

From my door I could not descry the gaps in the complement of the cell opposite. The solitary lamp hanging from the ceiling shone upon the survivors outstretched on the floor,

rolled in their bedding. Not one man troubled to get up as the officer passed, for their night had been a troubled one. Only Saturday night was quiet, for Franco's justice did not shoot on Sundays, nor on holidays. Death scarcely ever came on Mondays, nor on Saturdays. Four days out of seven sufficed. At eight o'clock the Mongol or his friends shot back the bolt and shouted:

"*Enfermos?*"

Ill? No, ill we were not, or rarely: but we were often extremely depressed.

At those times death went quickly about his business. None of us were ever present at his visits, though we were separated from them by only one door. The heavy tread of weapons and boots was heard on the stone floors. At what door would the soldiers knock? A melancholy obligation of the military calling. Since the time of the Crucified Christ there had to be soldiers present at every execution—soldiers, kindly or cruel, men of blood or men of heart. From outside, the gallery warden turned the electric commutator, and inside, the inmates of cell No. 456 knew what had come upon them. They had all taken valerian, the kindly poison which brings sleep, whatever may follow it. Still, at the first jet of light, the more restless or the least drugged among the company awoke, and his sudden movement awoke the rest. Then came the rattle of the bolt, the grinding of the key in the lock. The door opened outwards without a sound: doors were always kept well oiled. And the officer of police recited the doomed man's names and designation.

Sometimes he made a mistake. Instead of No. 456, he had, in the darkness, switched on the light in 457. Then, with much annoyance, he would shut the door again, turn, and pass on to the next. Sometimes, too, the warden would absent-mindedly switch on the light in two cells. Then the selfsame agony laid its clutch on the throats of two packed companies of prostrate forms, sixteen men instead of eight. The first cell heard the noise at the threshold of the second. Then a twist of the commutator put all to rights. Death had been a trifle absent-minded; he could be heard departing in the darkness, amid a clatter of hurrying footsteps.

Sometimes, too, the mistake was made by the authorities

themselves. One morning, when the order arrived from the Prefecture of Police, the officer on duty had six prisoners brought out. The procession was quickly formed as usual, and marched along to the rotunda where the Governor presides, the all-powerful Don José. There, a sinister performance awaited them. Don José had to hand them over to the State Police in accordance with the regulations. Each condemned man was called up to recite his name and his profession. One morning, when the sixth prisoner was called, Don José raised objections. The name of the condemned man was spelt differently on the police order and on the prison record. Don José refused his consent: "I cannot hand this man over," he objected: "it is too great a responsibility for me to take. You call him Jerdana. I call him Gerdana. I shall keep him." *G* and *J* before *i* and *e* are pronounced the same way in Spain, like the highly aspirated *h*, the *jotta* inherited from the Arabs.

Gerdana, or Jerdana, was a small, pale, fair-haired lad, with an unforgettably odd face, in blue dungarees. I had watched him often during those long weeks of agony, playing *pelota* or devouring oranges. That morning, when death had already gripped him by the shoulder, he felt death's hands relax their hold. The soldiers made a half-turn, the barred gate of Gallery III opened once again. Gerdana was escorted to the door of his cell: it opened, and in that instant all his surviving comrades rose from their mattresses with terror in their eyes. Could this be death returning? Had someone been forgotten? The light was on, with its infernal electric glare, harbinger of hell. It was Gerdana returning, more livid than ever, but alive. He collapsed on to the floor in a dead faint.

Exactly three days later he was reprieved and his sentence commuted to thirty years' imprisonment. But for an ill-written letter he would have been a dead man. In point of fact it was an astute bit of thimblery on the part of the Governor. Knowing that the man had put in his petition for reprieve, and had a good chance of getting it, he had made some enquiries. A clerk at the Prefecture, a neighbour and a village enemy of the condemned man, was known to have a grudge against him personally. The Governor was well enough acquainted with the course of criminal justice to know that, as between a police official and a fellow-villager condemned to death, the procedure of justice is not unlikely to be diverted from its course. The

said clerk had received the petition and had not put it on the man's file. The interval for presenting it would soon have lapsed. Time pressed if an innocent man was indeed to be sent to his death. A paper slipped into the bottom of a drawer, and the deed was done. A nasty little bit of official intrigue, nearly countered by another of its kind. A *G* instead of a *J*, and there you are.

Such nervous shocks as these did not in any way prevent these men about to die from maintaining the simple and touching ritual of life. Haunted as they might be by the tremendous ultimate catastrophe, they smiled, gossiped, played games, grew impatient at the approach of meal-times, thronged gaily round the tall, white-clad Sister who took charge of their souls and their little affairs.

She was a nun, with a story of her own. It was known that one of her brothers, a Red, had been shot. Since then she had devoted herself to the prisoners' welfare. The Model Prison housed all the personnel of a parish—a priest, two curates, and a dozen working Sisters. Sometimes, too, one or two Jesuits appeared, and distributed sweets and cigarettes. They were decent men, I daresay, but their smiles looked false in a place where there was so much talk of Christianity, but the gaolers practised it so little. I knew one Jesuit Father who indeed one day did me a very useful service. His pale, olive-hued countenance, with high cheek-bones under bushy eyebrows, did not inspire confidence or friendliness. He gave me the impression of uneasiness and fear, as of a man unwittingly submitting to a system of hypocrisy in which, for good or ill, he played his part. But the tall Sister positively radiated health and good humour. Imagine a gigantic matron, with the firm round cheeks of a strong woman of the Gospel, young and fresh, plain and vigorous, buxom, solid, built for milking cows, and fed on fat black-puddings. Her prisoners called her the Double White, from her height and her dress. With her spectacles on her large gooseberry-coloured nose, she inspired love and respect as well. Such she was, working like a matron-in-chief in a hospital, but only among her own incurables, all of whom appeared to be in the best of health. Their sole malady was the approach of death. Some recovered, as I have related. Over these there was much joy, but the cure was effected with no real assistance from the Faculty. I was present

at some of these happy events. I never again saw the man Gerdana, who, once reprieved, left our gallery, in accordance with the ritual, but his shocking case seemed to me to exemplify a whole epitome of political philosophy, to which I shall return.

Another of them was a little, old, gnarled peasant, who looked sixty but was in fact no more than forty (suffering and war age men very quickly): he passed me each day, with the crass, callous air of the rustic who makes as though he understands nothing, even when he often has a very good notion of what is going on. His haggard visage was innocent of guile. He never wept. Indeed, I never saw a man condemned to death shed tears, or show any sort of emotion. This man received the announcement of his reprieve one evening in December, when the damp air made the melancholy of that gallery seem more burdensome than ever. The walls positively oozed with gloom. The warder on duty, a quick-tempered but kindly Catalan, came to tell me in high good humour: "There's good news . . . the little old man is saved." And they removed the little old man, who himself removed his mattress and his rags, his yellowed garments, his basket of oranges and bananas, and a handful of cigarette tobacco. The officer on duty was the Carlist Andalusian, a kind-hearted fellow, the best man indeed I met with in the whole prison. He was overjoyed. The Double White was there. The little old man accepted their congratulations like a centenarian receiving a complimentary visit from the Mayor and the local Headmaster. He said good-bye to his friends: then he was taken down to the cellar, a habitation much coveted and sought after, because it was composed of but a single gallery, and not divided into cells. For how many years? Thirty years, said the Caudillo's decree. At the price of thirty years of life in a cellar, he had acquired the right not to die forthwith: a man of forty-six who looked sixty. His eyes shone with joy. Thirty years in a prison cellar—what more was needed to shed a glow of joy upon his countenance? There, after all, a man could live, sleep unaided by valerian until morning, and—who knows?—get some job inside the prison, taking round the soup, or in the offices, looking after the mattresses, or the letters, one of those duties which conferred the right to a double ration of soup, tips from the richer prisoners, and the *estraperlo*. For the basement was highly favourable to all crooked dealings, all those lucrative

little operations in which bread and tobacco played the essential part.

Now what had been the crime of this little old man of forty-six? Never having seen his papers, I should not like to say. Prisoners of that sort never breathed a word of their own history. The civil-law criminal always calls himself a political prisoner, and if he is not believed, he says he is innocent or the victim of a miscarriage of justice. The really distinguished political prisoner, on the contrary, stands forth as his own accuser, and his crimes, real or imagined, are his record of service. The little old man was a political prisoner, from the countryside. He claimed to have raided the Alcalde's cellar, who was a Fascist, and to have done very well out of the proceeds. Then an informer appeared, for every political prisoner had a known and accredited informer, with whom he reckoned to get even one day, in the shadow of a wood between dusk and dawn. The little man alleged that he had done no more than raid a Fascist's wine-cellar. After all, his lie, if a lie it was, had succeeded none so ill, since Death, who for many weeks past had approached him very near, left him in good trim. The Double White eyed him with affection. His fellows slapped him affectionately on the back. And he disappeared into the cellar—for thirty years. I have said that he looked sixty. He would therefore be ninety when he came out. But in the Model Prison no one doubted that the Democracies would have won the war before that distant day. Indeed, in two or three years from now, Fascism and its successor, Falangism, would have been swept from the surface of the earth. Two years or three years, reflected the prisoners, weighing their chances, divagating interminably on the forthcoming fall of Kertch, or Tobruk, or Sebastopol, picking up and passing on every sort of rumour, criticizing, hoping, eternally hoping, like so many millions of men scattered over the surface of Europe, who lived on in hope.

If there were a few pleasant surprises that fell to the population of the dying, the unpleasant ones were many more. In the Model Prison we all of us knew an agreeable, rather diffident youth whose profession in civil life had been that of house-painter. Like so many others he had been accused of "participation in the rebellion," and threatened with the penalty of death. At least, that was the penalty pronounced against him

by the authorities, but his lawyer had calmly reassured him. His sentence would be commuted to thirty years' imprisonment. And so, after this fortunate escape, he had taken up his abode in the first gallery. As a man of quiet manners, he had so endeared himself to his warders that they had entrusted him with a great deal of work in the building, and even outside it. A cheerful young fellow, about thirty, with hazel eyes, sturdy of body and deliberate in movement. But for his shaven head, no one would have put him down as a man condemned, a professional prisoner, sentenced to thirty years' detention. The prison authorities had shown him much indulgence. He went out into the city every day, worked on the walls of other prison buildings, painting and cleaning, and in the evening he came back to the Model Prison without ever making any attempt at escape; for his wife and children, who lived in the city, served him as hostages. He saw them: his sole punishment was not to live under their roof. But knowing them to be safe, after that daily meeting he returned, a model prisoner, to the Model Prison, with a light heart, awaiting a morrow which always brought him the same ration of light, space, affection, and labour. Only Sunday was taken from him. He was for ever deprived of holidays, of walks, of life in the country, of pleasant evenings in the sunshine, or on café pavements, where all Spain spends interminable hours over a long-since emptied cup, and innumerable carafes of water with wooden stoppers. Apart from that, he was a living man shorn of one limb, as it might have been a leg or an arm. He was forbidden access to Gallery V, which housed those who were to lose, not a leg or an arm, but their life, that little glimmering lamp that flickers within each and all of us, and which, when once extinguished, stops our hearts from beating, our eyes from seeing, and even deprives our nostrils of the sharp, sweet savour of tobacco smoke. An almost happy man, in fact.

One day a clerk in the rotunda called to him in a nonchalant tone. The man went along at once, feeling vaguely disquieted. The famous rotunda was composed of a sort of circular verandah, in the shape of a music kiosk, but closed. A glass cage in fact. The officer on duty, in the absence of the Governor, Don José, was always there, often half asleep. But nothing could happen in the prison without his authority, beginning with the opening of the gates to each gallery. In order to get out of our gallery

for exercise, we had to pass the rotunda and the ever-present officer.

The house painter, the quarter-prisoner, mounted the two steps and entered. It was thither, too, that those due for release were summoned on the morning of their departure. The painter set his heels together and stood. The officer on duty merely indicated to him with the bored air of an official charged with conveying some disagreeable news to a peaceable citizen, that he was condemned to death, and had been so a year ago. The order had gone astray, mislaid in the bottom of a drawer, no doubt. But it had been found: and here it was. The veritable paper, in all its sinister reality. The lawyer had made a mistake; and so had everyone else. After all, these things do happen in the public administration. Any clerk in the Land Registry, or the Posts and Telegraphs, will tell you just the same. It is little matter for astonishment if in an army of a million prisoners a sergeant-major sometimes makes a mistake over recruiting papers.

The officer did not say all these things; he merely hinted them. The victim departed to his new domicile. He had to say good-bye to his fellows, leave his mattress, and find another, in a new cell in Gallery V, among us, the passers-through, who looked forward to England, or to death. For the painter, it was not England. His shaven head would no longer know the *boina*. A new, maniacal tale began, much worse than for the others. His fellows kept on telling him not to mind, he would get used to it. A man might wait a long while here. . . . Six months, sometimes. Besides, there is always chance of a reprieve.

A reprieve had been refused, of course, a year before, though no one in the prison knew anything about it. And he who by the miscarriage of events had been so nearly freed, once restored to his true destiny, had not long to wait. He had been in the condemned gallery since Tuesday; on Thursday, before dawn, at the last hour of the night which the Spaniards called the *Madrugada*, the bolt shot back and the cell was abruptly flooded with light.

The key rasped in the lock, in the gallery the bayonets gleamed. The hour had come. A harsh voice recited the names. A final flash of hope,—in vain. His name was among them. What had to be done, was done quickly. On those

nights, from Monday evening to Friday evening, the condemned men always went to bed fully dressed. A man condemned to death awakened in pyjamas,—perish the thought ! Such a scene was never witnessed in the Model Prison. On that morning there were, quite exceptionally, six executions. That morning, too, a man, and one only, wept and cried aloud. We heard his lamentations. He whimpered like a child, as his voice faded into the shadows. It was the only time. And the offender was, I learned later on, the poor fellow whom Death, after ignoring him for so long, had come to fetch with all the greater promptitude.

About seven o'clock, when the orderlies brought our coffee, I dashed to the door. Six mattresses, six poor inanimate objects, lay at the threshold of two doors. The survivors, barely awake, and as always fully dressed, dipped their tin dishes into the coffee tureen, as did we. Their doors were shut once more, and then ours too. One hour later, with a towel round my neck, I lined up for the visit to the barber. Order had been restored everywhere. It was cold. The walls sweated misery. In the orderlies' kitchen-office I caught sight of old Ramirez, the stupidest of the warders. He had adjusted his spectacles on his flat nose, the typical nose of a confirmed alcoholic. Seated at a table, and wielding a steel pen, he was drawing out the inventory of the dead men's underclothes on a large sheet of white paper. Drawers, shirts, handkerchiefs, socks . . . and so on. Ramirez was very stupid. It took him time to write and calculate. The operation lasted a long while. When I left the barber's shop twenty minutes later, he was still at work. Well, well ! Six corpses left a lot of stuff behind them, which must not be mixed up nor overlooked.

And Ramirez knew from experience that a simple administrative error may involve unpleasant surprises. And sometimes a prison orderly might say, just once too often—" *Mañana.*"

CHAPTER 5

Among the Dying

THOSE about to die departed, in general, without the slightest protest. I could never discover exactly what happened before my arrival in prison on November 20th, 1941. According to the most senior prisoners, the first months succeeding the capture of Barcelona, on February 12th, 1939, were marked by much carnage. And indeed, the Reds having done no less, when proclaiming the Catalan Republic, later on, in 1936, the Whites had taken their revenge. The one logical specific was, in the victor's eyes, extermination, as practised by the Philistines and the Amalekites. Vengeance is a facile remedy which effects no cure. The Model Prison, as witnessed by the registers, at one time contained twelve thousand or so prisoners herded in such a promiscuity that many were housed on the galleries and the staircases. At exercise the courtyard was crammed. The shootings were more frequent and more rapid than in 1942. Every inmate of the prison assured me that it was so. There were many reprieves, that is to say, commutations of sentence to thirty years' imprisonment. Those thus favoured were naturally the most loquacious, and I must admit that their stories were reasonably consistent.

The walls of the exercise ground were crumbling and pitted with holes. But the witnesses of those great days assure me that those were not traces of machine-gun fire. Shootings never took place in the Model Prison, only suicides. During my four months' sojourn I only heard of four suicides. In the heroic times of 1939, many—I could never learn how many—flung themselves from one of the galleries, or hanged themselves. The bastinado flourished. And it still flourished in my time, for all the purposes of "examination," with certain Chinese refinements particularly directed at the sexual organs, devices of which certain Serbians had in my presence boasted of inflicting on their foes, the *Ustas*his. Indeed the tactics of voluntary confession had worked wonderfully at Barcelona as at Moscow, and in Red Barcelona likewise. Negrin's Cheka had merely been replaced by the Cheka of Serrano Suner. The famous torture-chamber which I had visited in March 1939, where so many honest folk had suffered martyrdom, functioned

afresh, and with no less inhumanity. Several of my companions in captivity knew all its usages and customs, having been executioners and victims turn by turn, without a blush for their occupation, old or new: though indeed there were other operations allowed to be a matter for more pride,—such as the mutilation of murdered priests, or the firing of churches. I can well believe, having been about a good deal in Catalonia, that these stories were a trifle exaggerated. They were men of the South. But some such deeds had been done. They were terrorists, now conquered, and subjected to another terror, more systematized, more German in fact, while they awaited a fresh vengeance.

In all this world the death sentence had been the instrument readiest to hand. I knew many of the senior inmates who had been condemned to death. Sentence was pronounced by judges arrayed in officers' uniforms, who laughed and smoked and jested: and the prisoners were led away to the Model Prison, there to await their fate. Many had been reprieved, and among those I knew not a few who had received two sentences of thirty years' punishment each. Life alone was left to them. The gallery orderly, an Andalusian anarchist, whose duty was lice inspection, had sixty years to serve. When I shared his incarceration and his lice, fifty-eight years of it were left. There were many who had received these doubly-commuted sentences. Twice they had awaited death. Twice had death turned away from them, after long nights of anguish and valerian, and of *Madrugadas*, those hours before the dawn, so soaked in horror and cold-sweat, of dates incessantly postponed, and the execution platoon that did not come that day, nor the next. . . .

"Franco's justice," as the prisoners often called it. And indeed Franco—little credit to him—did no more than imitate his victims. His justice was vengeance by another name, vile in all its operations, a remedy that kept the disease alive, and brought greater evils still, for since 1936 the *Lex Talionis* reigned supreme. A law equally detestable for its cruelty and its folly. I can scarcely imagine that ever in the course of history the practice of killing could have been pursued so deliberately, and with such tedious monotony. And after each execution the survivors resolved upon terrible vengeance in the days to come. A sort of roster of reprisal had been drawn

up. The Governor, of course, would be tortured : most of the officers hanged, or shot. The Chaplain would be killed. There was never agreement as to the method of execution. That depended on the day and the moment, the gusts of fury that at times swept over that herded throng. As for the tall Sister, the Double White, they would say with a laugh : " She is a good sort, we'll let her off with thirty years." But the Sister, who was versed in revolutions, knew very well that in her profession machine-gun bullets were just as likely to riddle her white hood as the warders' tunics.

This continual intervention of priests and nuns in judicial matters was a constant trouble to my mind. Agonizing Christs, Sacred Hearts, Our Ladies of Mercy, scriptural lithographs affixed to the glazed kiosk of the rotunda—all this sacred paraphernalia seemed shocking in a place where nearly everybody blasphemed at Mass. On Sunday those condemned to death were lined up in the gallery, in rows, like soldiers on parade. Foreigners were not compelled to attend Mass. They were merely asked to remain motionless and reverent. I planted myself in the cell doorway, missal in hand, and followed the Mass with my eyes just as readily as the condemned men lined up near by. A tall fellow, with a gaunt distinguished air, was there at my side this Sunday morning. He begged eagerly for news of the war. The slightest success filled him with joy. Upright, bareheaded, close-cropped, clean-shaven, impeccably distinguished, he would have made a magnificent magistrate in robe and bands. I talked to him about Russia, for four minutes before Mass and four minutes after it. He spoke French, in powerful, rasping tones.

" I'm an old soldier of the last war, one of the seventy-four thousand Catalans who fought in the ranks of the French army. When I got back here, I was still a Republican like everybody else. After February 1939 I fled to France, to the Haute Garonne : which was surely the natural thing for an old soldier of France to do. Would you believe it ?—the blackguardly local mayor had me arrested as an undesirable alien. Too many foreigners, it seemed : Vichy wanted to be rid of them. I was put in gaol : the *gardes-mobiles* came along and took me to the frontier, and here I am, condemned to death. . . ."

Mass began, and it was admirably sung. The tall prisoner,

so soon to die, remained standing, a gaunt emaciated figure, a fastidious hidalgo, with a cigarette behind his left ear. At the Consecration he knelt, obedient to orders, as did everybody else. It was very cold. Often indeed the rain came through into the gallery, and those about to die always kept their hands in their pockets all through Mass, especially at the Consecration. The ceremony over, my late neighbour always found means to offer me some little courtesy. It was useless for me to offer him English cigarettes. In exchange for good news he insisted on offering me Spanish ones. He was a proud, aloof creature. I could picture him as a fierce and eloquent speaker, carrying his forty-eight years magnificently, middle-aged, with slightly greying hair. No collar, nor tie, but a muffler loosely knotted round his neck, and his coat collar turned up.

One day he said to me, in the accent of Montpellier, or Toulouse, pointing to the altar on which the candles had just been lit: "To-day a pleasant little Mass . . . and to-morrow, ha, to-morrow . . . the firing squad," and waved his hand like a walker by the roadside who flicks the heads off the tall grasses with his stick.

He was right. He was shot the following Thursday. It was his last Mass. Before taking leave of me, he insisted sardonically on offering me a final cigarette. A refusal would have hurt his feelings. So I said:

"I will smoke it in your honour. And I'm sure it will bring you luck."

Perhaps, before the last great Judge, account will be taken of that ultimate gracious gesture. He was a blasphemer. He jeered at the Mass. He would have hissed the priest at the altar, but no heart is so plunged in bitterness as not to know at times a melting moment. There were occasions when he wished his fellows well.

These ruffians, good and evil—and what ruffian has not his better moments?—were certainly subjected to the gravest mis-handling of fate. Fate mocked at them: and shot them haphazard, like driven partridges. One little company would lose three or four members in September. Ah, thought the seniors, the tale is not yet told—and so it proved: in December, two or three others departed in their turn. The survivors thought themselves secure. But they were not always so.

One of my acquaintances was a thin fair-haired lad, of a very un-Spanish appearance, always dressed in whitish overalls. His vague eyes, his pensive, melancholy face, had attracted me for some time past. I wondered how he would die when his turn came. One afternoon, when we returned from exercise, the condemned men's doors were open, and there was much commotion everywhere. It was that shining hour when the flooding sunshine poured in upon them, and gave them that fresh-air look of patients in a sanatorium, which always stirred my heart. The tall fair lad, radiant, smiling, with tears in his eyes, was the centre of a large crowd. The officer on duty, a hard-bitten Falangist, actually came to shake him by the hand. Two condemned men had been allowed down from the upper galleries to offer him their congratulations. The tall fair lad in the white overalls had just received the glad news. He had been relieved. Rarely have I been present at such a moving scene. It was like the moment when a doctor, who has been fighting for a child's life, says to the mother: "Madam, he is saved." The Chaplain, Sister Double White, the officer on duty, all his friends came and told him, again and yet again, that he was saved. In the entire third gallery that evening there was great joy. How soundly he could sleep to-night, thought I. He would soon be in another cell, glad to be alive. He would sleep unaided. Everything that met his eyes, even the prison, seemed full of light and loveliness. Joy of the eyes, joy of the very heart. There is no place so desolate that, in times of joy, cannot reveal a beauty of its own.

Odd it was that, in the presence of that monotonous and inhuman procession, for some time past I had felt my heart grow hard. I began to be ashamed of my own callousness. But that evening I was possessed by feelings new and strange. That gaunt face, that tall lad weeping with joy, that horde of convicts who shared the general emotion, the glory of the sunlight—a scene more moving can hardly be conceived; except for the absence of women or children. The sufferings of men, herded among other men, are not affairs for tears. Men do not weep among themselves, unless their wives and children are concerned. But in the dull aridity of those bleak days, that day glowed like a spring morning, and not a few of us there felt happy because, in that prison, there was at last one happy man.

The next day passed. I was surprised that the happy man in

question had not been shifted to another cell. He was still as radiant as ever, but still among those condemned to death. No doubt a mere administrative lapse. The rotunda authorities had not been informed, or had not carried out the instructions of the Prefecture. In any case his reprieve had been officially communicated to the prisoner, with all proper formality, just as death sentences are announced. Good news arrived like bad news, in the middle of the week, but in broad daylight. They thumped on the door, entered, and took their man for good and all. Saturday and Sunday passed. Peaceful days, when men sleep unaided by valerian, and in pyjamas. I almost forgot the happy prisoner. He had been left there to encourage those less fortunate. On the following Tuesday he was shot at dawn.

He had been sentenced to death twice. The Caudillo's reprieve related only to his first sentence. The second retained its full validity. Had he misunderstood? Well, faced by a loaded machine-gun, he understood at last.

Another morning, a Thursday, at the hour of *Madrugada* summary action had to be taken in the guard-room. It was the first occasion, I believe. In any case it was the last, and this was why. The officer, in accordance with the ritual, having hailed the prisoner by his name and designation, waited for him in the gallery, and said:

"Have you no statement to make?"

"Yes," said the man.

"Well, go on, but be quick."

"Long live the Republic. Long live Democracy. . . . Down with the Dictatorships. . . . Down with Fas——"

The rifle-butts crashed down on to his bare skull, and he fell dead. Never had such a scandal disgraced Gallery V.

The corpse was carried to the rotunda. There, as for a living man, Don José read out the roll-call. Name, surname, profession, sentence, and why he had been sent for. Why? To hear the terms of his reprieve.

Since then there had never been any disturbance when the cell doors were opened. Death was often unaccountable: and was sometimes absent-minded.

We were strictly forbidden to be present at executions, but the

warders never failed to tell us the full story. The condemned man usually bade a very simple farewell to his companions. It was a moving moment in which Spanish dignity is seen in its noblest manifestation. These simple souls, for they were mostly men of the people, displayed all the grace and ease of the French aristocrats in the Carmes prison. From their cell to the rotunda, and thence to the gate, was but a step. At the outer gallery a priest was waiting, and in a little chapel they were invited to make their confession. Then they were given some bread and coffee. A magistrate presided at the last interview, accompanied by a lawyer, a notary, the officer of the guard, and the Chaplain. There were never any incidents. Appeals and lamentations were extremely rare, as I have said. The prison van carried the men away. It was half an hour's drive to the seashore, where, facing the Mediterranean, the machine-gun awaited them with those to serve it. A squad of soldiers, drawn up slantwise, standing easy, assisted at the ceremony. A few curt orders, and in the loveliest landscape in the world, on a shore washed by waters ever blue, a poor, fallow, shaven mortal fell. The gunners were chosen from all arms, each in turn, gendarmes, soldiers, civil guards, Falangists, and Security police, so that each and all of these corps might claim the responsibility for what was done, the honour or the shame of it. Thus, in case of reprisals, the victims' relatives would have to proceed against them all.

In the early days cruelty devised a few refinements. I knew an elderly prisoner, from Gallery I, who had been forced to be present at the execution of his son, with arm upraised and singing the Falangist hymn. In my time such a performance was no longer in fashion.

Coffins were made at the expense of the condemned, if they had any assets. For the others, there was the common ditch. The authorities attached great importance to those coffins. Only those about to die gave little thought to them. They called a coffin *vestido de madera* (a wooden suit), and often mentioned them to me with something of a laugh.

Among so much death and desolation my most enduring memory is of a resurrection. Events so fell out that it assumed extreme importance in my mind. Scanning the faces of those condemned to death, I had marked a tall young man with an

eager, intelligent face and all the air of an intellectual of good family. Everything about him indicated a man of the great world, his graceful figure, slim neck, irregular but delicate features, heavy eyelids: a veritable *señorito*. His clothes, too, were in keeping. Without a tie (ties were forbidden to such as might attempt suicide), in his soft shirt he looked like a Balliol undergraduate on his way to the cricket-field. He was something more than handsome: he was an aristocrat. And he had lovely, delicate hands.

The hands of those condemned to death—I knew them all: for every Sunday they had to raise them, with arms outstretched, during the performance of the three hymns, Falangist, Carlist, and the old national air of Royal days. These men condemned who sang, at the end of a Mass which they derided, the praises of *Dios, la Patria, y el Rey*, while awaiting, in the name of the selfsame sacrosanct principles, their slaughter at the hands of an execution squad, certainly presented the most farcical spectacle in contemporary history. But they sang, since they had to, and any evasion would have exposed them to annoyances which were not worth the trouble. The tall distinguished youth sang like all the rest, with arm outstretched. When the rain came through into the gallery, he put on gloves, black gloves, for he was in mourning, and wore an armlet on his light-grey overcoat. As I watched him thus, motionless and indifferent, his eyes completely expressionless, I said to myself: "I must have seen him before somewhere, but where?"

I had merely seen him among many others of his kind, in many of the capitals of Europe. So many other youths like him, fair in Germany, dark in the South, had taken the road of social revolution, arrayed in clothes by a good tailor. In the Model Prison, he was the sole specimen, which was why his prestige was unrivalled. A prison is rather like a university. It has its successful men, its heroes, its humorists, and its victims. The immense majority of the inmates of the Model Prison were of plebeian origin, from the ranks of working men and clerks. The tall young man, whom I will call Luner, was a lawyer, a sort of daemonic intellectual, rich, eloquent, and an ex-commissary to a brigade. Moreover, he was engaged to the niece of M. Serrano Suner, the Executioner of Spain.

All those condemned to die got their families to send them soporifics in the food parcels which were distributed on Wednes-

days. The handsome Luner had his sent by the niece of Torquemada himself. In point of fact his betrothed delivered him from much beside insomnia. She saved his life twice. Luner was now in the course of his second sinister experience. A first time he had been condemned to death, and reprieved, for Serrano Suner had saved his niece's *novio*. But that had not prevented him from re-enacting the same ceremony on a second charge, a ceremony which was in the course of performance at the time of my sojourn in the Model Prison. But the rumour went about that Luner would be reprieved a second time. And so, in the end, he was.

It was then that I witnessed the prodigious spectacle of a man beginning a new life. At the age of twenty-seven, a lawyer, an intellectual, and a revolutionary, here he was on the threshold of the future, just as on the day when a decorous nurse held him out to the vicar of some Catalan chapel all perfumed with jasmine and incense. He was indeed serving two sentences of thirty years each, which would keep him in the Model Prison until he was eighty-seven. But that did not trouble him at all. He lived. That was the essential. The handsome Luner was alive. He beamed upon his little world. He was an admirable mimic, and reproduced in pantomime for his companions' benefit every scene of prison life. Added to which, when the authorities changed his cell they did not move him to another gallery, merely to another story. Now each side of each gallery was like a cupboard with several shelves one above the other. The second story was exactly similar to the first, and was placed precisely opposite another exactly similar story. From one side to the other it was possible to converse by signs. Luner's vivacious countenance was now radiant with contentment. Pale he still was, but he had a tie, and what a tie! With what dash and style, what air of life renewed, that tie was knotted! When he went out for exercise, in his thick blue woollen dressing-gown, his elbows to his sides, and rolling cigarettes with all a conqueror's dexterity, every plebeian prisoner recognized and admired him. He had soon discovered a companion to act as his masseur. Already a Doctor of Law, he was preparing for the "*Conseil d'État*." He read eagerly, to make up for lost time. His first life had taught him the value of the second. This one he meant to exploit to the full.

It was at that moment that I became acquainted with him.

Nor was it difficult. The warders had been soon suborned, and allowed him every indulgence. He came and went from one cell to another more or less as he liked. So indeed did I. What time he could spare from his own high pursuits, he spent among the rabble of the prison. His companions' daily lives, their obsessions, their petty histories, their enmities, their trickeries—he knew them all. And, for their part, with what admiration they spoke of the great Luner. It was like the pride of petty socialists in Paris and Brussels when they used to speak of Blum or Vandervelde. But in the case of Luner there was something more, for this natural aristocrat was courteous, brave, and kind. He had a way with him. On the day when the poor lad in white overalls heard he was reprieved, I saw Luner scramble down from his first story, run across to his companion's cell, the old condemned cell, dash up to him and clap him on the back in exuberance of joy, in a generous salutation from one joyous heart to another newly made so. These are moments usually known to none but soldiers at the wars.

And yet, no one more than Luner personified to my eyes the cruelty of Spain. This intellectual, well-bred young man had not merely been commissary to a brigade, but a judge on a military tribunal. He had calmly sent hundreds of men to their deaths. For those, no doubt because he was a Spaniard, he had no pardon. In defeat, he calmly awaited the victory of England as heralding the overthrow of Franco's régime. Then he and his friends would resume the reins of power . . . and start the massacre afresh. But this time it would be much more comprehensive apparently, than in 1936. . . .

Such, in 1942, was the state of mind of a Barcelona lawyer who had twice escaped the execution squad. Some time indeed I reflected that, all things considered, Serrano Suner might be sorry he had spared his niece's fiancé . . . and had given him back his elegant necktie.

I entered the Model Prison in the company of three stocky little British soldiers, from the Buffs and the Gordon Highlanders. I pointed out to them the long line of our unhappy neighbours, and said: "Those are the men condemned to death." They smiled an unbelieving smile. The second time they suspected me of an ill-timed joke. But one day, confronted by a particularly dismal array of mattresses, they were compelled to accept the evidence. They shook their heads in horror:

and the oldest of them merely muttered: "Well, England's good enough for me."

CHAPTER 6

Death to the Priests

ONE day when I had managed to slip unobserved into Gallery I, on a visit to some Belgian airmen friends, I fell in with a youth in blue overalls who looked plebeian, but very Spanish, and wore sandals. This gallery, where the cells had been doorless since 1939, was tenanted by quiet folk, mechanics, painters, workers of all kinds employed about the building, and musicians. The man in blue overalls was no more nor less than an Anarchist of the deepest dye, with a whole history of his own.

His main subject of conversation was death. Killing was his sole interest in life. With him it was a mania, a second nature. At thirty, he was already serving his third term in the Carcel Modelo. On the first occasion, under the Gil Robles government, he had escaped his enemies through a drainpipe. In 1936, his friends of the Iberian Anarchist Federation had come to rescue him armed with machine-guns. Finally, during the Civil War, he had been chief agent of the Anarchist Committee of Valencia. He was commonly known as Ramon. I always forgot to ask his surname.

Ramon was at once the glory of the Model Prison, and its enigma. Although a professional assassin, and boasting of the fact, he had never been condemned to death. And the reason for this was an open secret. While in charge of Valencia prison he had had in his care, at one time, seventy bishops, canons, marquises, colonels, and other notables, whose importance was, I fancy, a good deal exaggerated in the tales he told. One day the Communist Committee sent him an order for their execution. Now Ramon was an Anarchist. He would accept no orders from Communists, by reason of his Doctrine. Anarchists, as is common knowledge, in addition to many unusual characteristics, possess a Doctrine which no one has ever been able very exactly

to define, but of which they are very proud. The Communists assailed him with menaces, but Ramon was not in the habit of allowing himself to be intimidated. He preserved his bishops and his dukes, not from any regard for them, but because it pleased him to defy the Communists.

That is why the bishops and the dukes, whose lives he had saved, saved his. He was merely sentenced to imprisonment, and returned to the Carcel Modelo. I suspect him of having sometimes embellished his stories, and of making himself out more important than he was. Indeed he enjoyed immense prestige throughout the prison. To have killed a large number of people is nothing. Many Spaniards have done as much. Besides, Ramon always talked of killing. This was the sort of tale he told, and quite ingenuously.

"We got fed up with the priests at last, in 1936. They hid machine-guns in their convents. Franco's chaplains used to encourage their men by shooting from the ranks. One day I cornered one. I soaked him in petrol and set him alight. He burst into flames and bounded like a goat, just for a minute or so. Then he lay still, while his body went on slowly burning. Two days later he was still smouldering."

I feel we have heard that story before somewhere. Exaggerated or not, it enjoyed great credit in the Carcel Modelo, and Ramon, as he shuffled in his sandals from one cell to another in the doorless gallery, met with unfailing looks of admiration as he passed.

At the Carcel Modelo, on the first evening, when the officer on duty brought me in, one sole picture struck me, that of the Sacred Heart. It was lit by a harsh electric glare. In the rotunda there was a picture of Christ imploring mercy; and on the cell doors were oleos of Notre Dame de la Merced, patroness of captives. Not a calendar that did not display some pious picture, in the dismal style of 1900, the seminary style so justly execrated by many Catholics nowadays. There were no other pictures in that place of torment. Obviously the authorities had forbidden everything but Catholic emblems, and the clergy had taken full advantage of the fact.

Perhaps, in that habitation of anguish and boredom, these sacred objects did us some sort of good. In any case, they reminded us all of scenes we knew, sacristies odorous of incense, and schools where we had been very bored. I expect we are all

of us touched by the sight of some faded print that charmed our youth.

Did any thoughts like these present themselves to the Spanish prisoners? Who knows? The prison sacristans, chosen from among the professional criminals, had very likely had their hours of childish fervour, and plunged as they were in every sort of degradation, those touching, tender images may have reminded them of dimly remembered words of love and piety. I don't suppose they were ever thereby cured of their taste for murder, for that taste once acquired is not readily effaced, and my worthy companions had preserved it unimpaired. Thus, among animals, the flesh-eater or man-eater having once tasted man, never loses the craving for man's blood. Killers are much addicted to our species. But the Spaniard, religious as he may be, is not humane. He has faith, even when he blasphemes, but very rarely charity.

I ask the reader to join with me in judging with every indulgence a nation which had remained totally aloof from the great emotional movements of the two last centuries. Spain only received Jean-Jacques' message at second-hand. The emotional currents that swept over the rest of Europe never penetrated directly into Spain. The Romantics inspired us with the mighty and now classic theme of Pity. Though we have not read Michelet and Hugo since we were boys of fifteen at school, their messages have passed into our minds. For quite some time susceptibility to pity, and even to tears, was the fashion. It began in high society. The Revolutionaries adopted it, and took up the cause of negroes, children, and criminals. Victor Hugo claims compassion for dogs and cats and spiders. Yes, why not for spiders, ugly as they are? We answer: "Because they are noxious." The Spaniard reasons likewise about man.

What is to be done with an adversary impervious to argument, except suppress him? The Spaniard, strong as is his craving to preserve his life, clings more closely to his principles. Once his mind is set, he will never abandon his position. Marxist or Anarchist, he will so remain, oblivious of compromise. The Englishman effects, in the end, a settlement by compromise, because life must continue, and sectarianism makes life impossible. The English are not disposed to live under intolerable conditions. Moreover, they are emotional. They protect their

animals, and bull-fights horrify them, because the bull, unlike the hunted fox, "hasn't got a chance."

We are set to the idea that killing is monstrous in time of peace; true justice does not shed human blood in time of peace. War, indeed, provides occasion for a monstrous vengeance on these sacrosanct principles. But war itself is surely horrible. It must in justice be admitted that we did nothing to provoke it, either in 1914 or 1939. The Germans, who have made a national industry of war, are probably alone in enjoying its practice.

This legalistic emotionalism, this respect for blood and suffering, is quite foreign to the Spanish race. Florence Nightingale, and the Abolitionists, make no mark on Spain. Most people forget that Red Cross hospitals date from the Crimean War. It was not until Dickens's passionate campaign that Puritan and Victorian England reformed her Poor Law. The Salvation Army and Dr. Barnardo belong to the same period. Humanitarianism came among us like the benevolent visitations of a doctor attending the Nineteenth Century upon its course. It was then that Hugo described the last days of a man condemned to death. No one had previously remarked that those same days might be extremely disagreeable. It had been customary to think only of the victim's guilt; of his sufferings, not at all. Indeed, they were regarded as well suited to his crime.

The sole virtue of the Carcel Modelo was the discretion shown in dealing with death. Of the prisoners, only the most select, the foreigners, were allowed to see the condemned men and exchange a final salutation, but they never saw them die. The mattress, and the heap of rags at the doorway, were sole witness to the fact that the forfeit had been paid. No doubt Ramirez put on his spectacles to make the inventory. It was the omen of the catastrophe to come. Apart from that, the condemned men lived, without much hope indeed, but with a sort of wild intensity. I knew some who could scarcely read, and who made the most desperate efforts to learn. In the evening, during the concert, when all doors were open and all movements could be observed, I noticed one of them every day, reading aloud, and frowning and nodding as he spelt out every word. He was a fresh-faced lad, hardly more than a boy: and there he was, learning to read, with all the passion of his heart, standing up with his back against the wall in a broad ray of

sunlight. A few days remained to him, perhaps only a few hours. He must make haste and learn to read properly before he closed his eyes for ever.

Thus I saw the condemned men at work and at play. I never saw them pray nor shed tears. Sunday Mass was, to them, merely part of the prison routine.

Sunday Mass at the Carcel Modelo was a beautiful and melancholy ceremony. That day the glass partitions were removed from the central kiosk. About ten o'clock an altar was erected and decked with flowers. Candles were lit. In each gallery the prisoners came out of their cells and lined up in rows. On the upper floors some of them remained on the balconies. All these men, in each and every gallery, this vast congregation of eight thousand souls, waited, on the alert. Imagine the compass of a religious ceremony which assembled eight thousand persons in this same building; enough to fill a cathedral. Only the foreigners were not obliged to leave their cells. Foreigners retained the right of unbelief, not being Spaniards.

The bugle heralded the priest's arrival. From the doorway of my cell I assisted at the ceremony, like a villager watching a local fête through a field-glass from his balcony. The orchestra immediately struck up the national anthems. The priest approached the altar, always preceded by two prisoners dressed up for the occasion, with starched collars and ties, looking like a couple of respectable provincial tradesmen. It was the novelty of the spectacle that made it noteworthy. In that world of rags and tattered uniforms to which we belonged, it was agreeable to see two such worthies in ceremonial black coats and grey gloves. Both were serving sentences of thirty years' imprisonment, a fact which disgusted the entire congregation. On that point all were unanimous. It was about the only one.

Suddenly, in the middle of the Chant, the music stopped abruptly. The priest at the foot of the altar made a sweeping sign of the cross. The bell tinkled discreetly. The orchestra gave an admirable rendering of one of the classic Masses, and, a few of the foreigners murmured: "*Introibo ad altare Dei.*"

And what was really shocking was that not one single Spaniard followed their example.

On only one occasion was there an incident during Mass: and even so it was not observed by anyone in the course of the

Divine Sacrifice. One of the condemned men, on the pretext of feeling ill, had stayed in his cell. When his companions came back, after the *Benedicamus Domino*, he was found strangled. Immense courage had been needed, for all the window-bars had been carefully removed; no man could hang himself.

But the moment had been well chosen. During Mass a prisoner was sure of not being disturbed.

At Christmas-time I often meditated on the joyful message: Peace to men of goodwill. How many, in the eyes of God, were men of goodwill in a purgatory like this? I knew hardly any who admitted to being so. On the contrary, they all blazoned themselves as infidels.

True it is that men are never as bad as they would make themselves appear. The little Carlist officer had had much experience of this fact. He was by profession a town clerk of a large *pueblo* in Andalusia, an honest official, Catholic and Carlist, whose house the Reds had in their folly burnt down.

By way of compensation he had been provided with a quiet little job. And what better could be done for a man out of employment in Spain in those days than appoint him prison warder? The kindly and conscientious little Andalusian, who had never killed a man, was placed in charge of the famous Fifth Gallery, where dwelt the foreigners and those marked down for death. He always had a smile and a word of cheer for everybody. For him we were always on our best behaviour: we were orderly, prompt, willing, and helpful, and he would thank us with a wink. As though by chance, when the little Carlist's turn of duty came round, everything went like clockwork in Gallery V. If one of us had a sore finger, he did not rest until it was receiving proper treatment.

His best reward was our attitude during the national anthems. They had to be endured every day, at the close of the concert; Falangist, Carlist and National. No foreigner needed to join in, or to raise his arm. When the little Carlist was on duty at our door, we rose to our feet at the first notes of the Carlist hymn, arms uplifted, and we sang: yes, we sang that hymn with all our hearts:

*"Por Dios, la Patria, y el Rey
Lucharemos nosotros tambien."
("For God, our country, and the King
We also will fight.")*

And indeed it was true. The little Carlist was shifted, and placed by the authorities in charge of Gallery I, where the workers were housed, a peaceable population. Our farewells were touching: "I am distressed at leaving you," he said. "And I was particularly attached to the condemned men. I was the last to speak to them before they went. Perhaps my words brought consolation to some few, and one good thought: well, if I did no more than get it into each man's mind, my time may not have been wasted."

He was right. In his place came Pucharra.

CHAPTER 7

"Por Dios, la Patria, y el Rey"

P UCHARRA was the perfect type of those ill-conditioned youths whom the Fascist régimes raise from nonentity to positions of authority. A Majorcan with the physique of a boxer, a crushed nose, a pipe always in his mouth, a horrible quacking voice (the young Belgians used to call him *Coin-Coin*), and a complete inaptitude for any employment—such were the principal gifts bestowed by nature on Pucharra. His story was a very simple one. As a would-be officer in 1936, he had failed in his entrance examination to the Military School. Five minutes of his company was enough to explain why. The war helped him to attain a rank to which his attainments gave him no sort of right. He became *Alférez*, that is to say, a Second Lieutenant. In 1939 he was still a Second Lieutenant. The demobilized army contained a plethora of platoon-commanders. Pucharra was on the lookout for a job. He found one as a prison warder. The crassness of his conversation was only equalled by his stupidity.

A few wealthy prisoners would slip him a bottle or two of Pedro Domecq brandy. Pucharra was very ill-paid. He accepted them. He was greatly upset by any German defeat, and made no mystery of the fact. This type of man, unendurable in his vanity and incompetence, always finds his vocation in

"POR DIOS, LA PATRIA, Y EL REY,"

official life. In democratic France he would have got a job as a schoolmaster or tobacconist. In Fascist Spain, however, he became a Party and Police Official.

His outlook was that of crude materialism. As he chattered and joked with the prisoners, every word he said betrayed the flat egotism characteristic of such men. He believed in nothing. A Falangist, in brief, and nothing else, who sang of an evening like everybody else:

"*Por Dios, la Patria, y el Rey.*"

But he did not believe in any of them.

Here lies the whole problem of dictatorship in Spain. A Catholic soldier, a loyal and upright man, dreams in 1936 of saving his country from the frightful anarchy of the Popular Front. The bloody disorders of those times provided my prison comrades with many lively anecdotes. All those who opposed the progress of the Socialist revolution were shot out of hand in the streets. Franco, a Catholic and a soldier, appeared from the Canaries and won the support of the entire army of Morocco. At the same moment Mola succeeded in a similar enterprise at Burgos, and Queipo de Llano at Seville. But little blood was shed. A few summary volleys were enough to restore complete order in those cities where only yesterday the *Frente Popular* had been supreme. But the stroke failed in the two largest cities of Spain: Madrid and Barcelona. So, instead of a *Pronunciamento*, there followed a protracted civil war in which both sides, Reds and Whites, appealed for more or less mercenary help from abroad. The Reds shot priests. The Whites, victorious at last, established a régime of force in which the Catholic Republic was declared the State religion.

The ferocity of Red rule was only equalled by the cruelty of White rule. The latter sat in judgement on those guilty of "rebellion." Charges were brought, and cases dealt with out of hand, after the manner of the Gestapo. But, unwearied, unrelenting, the investigations went on and on, and the list of the guilty lengthened daily. In 1942, when I was in the Carcel Modelo, the Caudillo was slowly inaugurating his enquiry into the events of 1937, and for those accused the end of it was death. This almost sadistic vengeance proceeded against a ubiquitous background of rosaries and Masses, Catholic priests and Catholic liturgy.

Seldom, we must admit, has a Christian soldier, claiming to serve the Catholic religion, done it such mortal disservice.

Spain is a Catholic country, said the soldiers of Franco. When it ceases to be Catholic, on that day will it cease to be Spanish. True enough. But was it necessary, for the honour of *Hispanidad*, to implant in the hearts of a million Spaniards hatred of the priest and contempt for the Sacraments?

A few priests came and went in the galleries. And almost always their appearance coincided with disaster. They most frequently arrived in the middle of the week. The reason was obvious. On Sunday, when no shooting was done, there was no occasion for their presence.

On February 11th, 1942, third anniversary of the fall of Barcelona, General Franco paid a solemn visit to the city, and the ceremonies lasted three days. We were given pea soup and three mandarins each. Our weekly prison journal, *Redencion*, published accounts of the festivities. The Caudillo's speeches were known to us all, and some of them certainly made exhilarating reading. His address to the textile workers was particularly quoted, and displayed a sound comprehension of the social problems of the present day. He talked of appeasement. Rumours of an amnesty were put about. It was the time when prisoners serving twelve-year sentences were released, by degrees, in small contingents. The chaplains were much in evidence in the condemned cells, prodigal in their predictions of pardon soon to come. That was on a Saturday. Well, it might be that on the Sunday the Caudillo would show his magnanimity. On Sunday again, there was rice soup and mandarins. From the exercise ground we could see the garlands and carpets hanging from the balconies near by. The more hardened among us, our political pessimists, went about with gloomy faces. Was Franco belying himself? Monday did but strengthen these provisions. A wave of optimism swept over the Fifth Gallery. The chaplains were full of good cheer, and their visits were awaited with impatience.

On the Thursday four condemned were summoned before dawn. The Chaplain adjured them to make a good death. They fell, with blasphemies or jests upon their lips.

In the projects of reprisal, on the grand night of Revenge, the survivors had condemned the Chaplain to thirty years' imprisonment. That evening they sentenced him to be shot.

Over every door of every cell there was a little picture, and beneath it the legend: "Notre Dame de la Merced, patroness of captives, pray for us." Sometimes the sable-clad clerics, touched no doubt by our air of melancholy, visited us too, bringing cigarettes and holy pictures. They entered our cells, with their birettas at a jaunty angle, and talked in their falsetto voices. These priests were not bad fellows by any means. They did their best under a régime whose backing did them much more harm than good. Many of us could not understand such an allegiance—priests who took the side of Hitler and Mussolini!

One of them, a Jesuit Father, one day so far forgot propriety as to speak to me in praise of Belgium.

"We love Belgium, and the Belgians," he said, "because we know that the Belgians are excellent Catholics. I myself have a very kindly memory of Belgium where our Fathers were very well received at the time of the last persecutions, from 1932 to 1939. . . ."

It was true. I had forgotten. The Spanish Jesuits had been received in Belgium with extreme generosity. Hundreds of them had settled in the provinces of Namur and Luxembourg. In return for our hospitality, we Belgians had merely asked our guests to behave with due discretion, and indeed my anti-clerical friends had observed the compact like everyone else. The Jesuits of Spain lived in Belgium as we should have liked to live in Spain, without attracting attention, and disappearing as promptly as we could. Would they not have done better to repay us in kind?

About the same time, an English Jesuit was arrested at Valladolid for his mere offence of passing through the country, like ourselves, and paid the same penalty. But the Van Nekker incident was much more painful.

CHAPTER 8

The Martyrdom of Father Van Nekker

FATHER VAN NEKKER was a Barnabite from the Avenue Brugmann at Brussels. A rather violent preacher, he had a few passages at arms with the Rexists, whose chief had held him up and questioned him on the very steps of his pulpit. This boisterous Barnabite was a native of Bruges, a man of my own country, that is to say a man accustomed to speak his mind. He did so : and to such purpose that one fine morning he was warned by friends that the authorities were on his track. A German agent in plain clothes was posted opposite the church at the corner of the Rue Darwin. I lived for eleven years in that quarter of Brussels. I have so often attended Mass in that Barnabite chapel, so often bought cakes for my children at that very pastrycook's, that the scene seemed quite familiar when its protagonist told me the story. The monk's farewells were deeply felt, and quickly made. In order to get out of the church, he adopted the simplest device. He sent for his sister, put on lay clothes, and walked out arm in arm with the young lady under the very nose of the German policeman. Van Nekker was a tall, a very tall young man, fair-haired, and wore spectacles. He got to Perpignan and Barcelona, where he was imprisoned, describing himself as a commercial traveller on his way to the Congo.

No one, either at the Prefecture or at the Carcel Modelo, suspected this tall thin Belgian, so hearty and good-humoured, of being a priest and a preacher. He became acquainted with the squalid cells of the Prefecture, the bleak desolation of the Fifth Gallery, and the approaching prospect of Miranda camp. One fine evening the prison van arrived unexpectedly to take him to the Prefecture. There he awaited his fate, in a cell like everybody else. At one in the morning a very inquisitive gendarme took him up to one of the large offices on the first floor where two men were waiting to interrogate him, one obviously a Spaniard, and the other obviously a German.

They offered the prisoner a cigarette. It was a Bogdanoff, of an Egyptian brand much in favour in Belgium, and the white

cardboard packet bore the Belgian Customs imprint, 0,50 f. And the Belgian monk understood.

He was shown his photograph, in ecclesiastical dress.

"Who are you really?"

"Why should I tell you, since you know already."

"Indeed we do. You are Father Van Nekker, a Catholic priest. Here is your address at Brussels, and the address of your parents at Bruges. . . ."

The case was lost in advance.

The German was obviously intent on finding out two things : first, the ramifications of the Belgian organization to which the monk had belonged ; next, and more particularly, the route he had taken from Brussels to Barcelona. He forgot the essential fact, which was that Van Nekker had, among others, helped to conceal from the Germans some very large stores of arms. The fair-haired inquisitor, who sat smoking Belgian Bogdanoffs, cared little for essential facts and concentrated solely on details. He would have it that the monk had stopped at Toulouse for lunch. Now it so happened that the monk had not stopped at Toulouse.

The examination, which began at one in the morning, lasted until precisely nine o'clock. On any other occasion Van Nekker, after a sleepless night, would have been overcome by exhaustion. But in all distresses Providence will always provide the heart of grace that a man needs to meet them. Van Nekker, nervous and impatient at the outset, displayed during that interminable ordeal an extraordinary self-control and impassivity. As time went on his replies became almost nonchalantly frank. The Spaniard fell into a doze. The German, sweating blood and water, had to give up the attempt. He had a plan of Bruges. Van Nekker had, in Belgium, engaged himself in every sort of risky game, but not at Bruges. It so happened that he was telling the truth.

Suddenly, about five in the morning, the German barked at him :

"We have the honour to inform you that your parents have been arrested."

"Thank you for that honour."

"Would you dare to swear on the crucifix that you have not been in Bruges?"

"Certainly."

"We have no crucifix here. . . . We could . . ."

"That doesn't matter. I have my rosary. . . . Here it is. . . . I swear——"

"Do not trouble. . . ."

The examination continued. Van Nekker's questioner claimed to be a Spaniard.

"You are not a Spaniard," Van Nekker retorted.

"How do you know?"

"You have a German accent."

"It's an international accent," interrupted the autocratic Spaniard.

"I've never heard of that kind of German accent. . . ."

"My colleague belonged to the Condor Legion in Spain, the International Legion. . . ."

"Ah, now I understand. All the Condor Legionaries are Germans. . . ."

At this point occurred a curious incident. Subjected to the torture of the question, the Belgian priest noticed, at the height of a seated man's head, small holes in the planking of the walls, which were covered with a flowered paper. These flowers had been pierced, a little too obviously, for it was easy to observe that they served solely for photographing the accused, full face and in profile, and that someone was coming and going behind the screen of wall-paper, like Hamlet behind the arras.

The month was August. The sun began to warm the stones of that haunted castle. The police spy went off to bed. Said the Spaniard to the Belgian priest:

"What was it made you think that *Seguridad* agent was a German?"

"Quite simple. . . . When he signed to me he raised his forefinger and jerked it backwards. A Spaniard never does that. He uses his whole hand with the fingers turned downwards, much as we do when saying good-bye at a railway station. He did this. . . . A Spaniard does that. . . ."

For anyone who has lived in Spain the contrast is indeed unmistakable.

And that dreadful farce, so humiliating for Spain, so degrading to Germany, achieved no result. The victim got the better of his tormentors. Thus it was that the monk, delivered up for torture by a Spaniard to a German police spy, came calmly back to the Carcel Modelo. He needed for saying his Mass

certain ecclesiastical documents, for which we applied to the Superior of his Order in Rome. The Superior, an Italian, sent them with a paternal message, best wishes for his release, and affectionate congratulations.

So the prisoner Van Nekker, in the passing of a day, once more became Father Van Nekker, to the stupefaction of the chaplains, who, putting a good face upon the matter, authorized him to say Mass every day. The entire doctrine of the Franco government was turned upside-down. Don José himself, who loved to marshal his prisoners for Mass like a drill-sergeant on parade, learned with amazement that thenceforward his victims would include a priest. Doubtless he would have preferred the authorities to get rid of the man at once. But what was to be done with so embarrassing a prisoner?

Van Nekker, the prisoner-priest, enjoyed an immediate success among these devourers of clerics, and what at first was no more than eager curiosity was soon transformed into the warmest sympathy. For the first time it appeared that the Church was not wholly involved with the Fascists. "You see," said Van Nekker gaily, "that it isn't true, since I am here."

One morning, as the prisoners learned to their indignation, he left the prison. A police agent came very politely to fetch him away. On leaving the Carcel Modelo, the monk, who was fasting, asked, when passing a church, for permission to receive Communion. It was promptly granted. His escort who continued to be highly affable, was to take him to Madrid. Why to Madrid? He had no notion. Just like my policeman who promised I should be in Gibraltar next day, the man talked about a few administrative formalities, handed his charge into a first-class compartment on the train, and gave him an excellent lunch on the restaurant car. Coffee, cigars, a pleasant doze, to the rhythmic rumble of the express as it rolled across Castile—it all seemed very restful to a prisoner freed at last. But what kind of freedom was to be his? His ceremonious escort didn't know.

At least, he said he didn't. On the following night Father Van Nekker found himself in a cell, in the *Seguridad* on the Puerta del Sol, at Madrid, in a cell quite as squalid as that in the Prefecture of Barcelona. There, once more, he was interrogated by a German.

There he remained for sixty-two days. Those familiar with

German prison cells know what the promiscuity of a gaol can mean. This recollection has no terrors for them. I would merely ask them to observe that here was a case of a priest imprisoned by a government whose watchword was the defence of the Christian faith. No doubt in Brussels or Paris, under the German régime, he would have finished the war in prison, without any other form of trial. In Spain too he remained in prison. And during those two long months his sole sustenance was his ration of two hundred grammes of bread. A gendarme, whom I shall speak of again, showed the most affecting kindness to many of our company. There was no assistance from outside. For sole society the dregs of Madrid, a foul medley of bullies and perverts who by some chance came to know their companions' sacred mission.

And they took full advantage of the circumstances. The poor priest was treated like a priest, that is to say he was subjected to the filthiest abuse by the painted catamites of the Madrid night-houses. Transferred to the prison of the Santa Engracia, he had, like everybody else, to go through the process of disinfection, stand naked in the middle of the yard, and submit to the insults of the same foul horde. Van Nekker was a cheerful young man, not easily put down. This time he thought the limit had been passed, and protested. He said to the officer on duty:

"I am a Catholic priest."

"Priest or not, you are a prisoner . . ." was the reply.

And yet, on the cell doors, here too the holy pictures proclaimed: "Our Lady of Mercy, patroness of captives, intercede for us."

Santa Engracia, like so many Spanish prisons, had formerly been a church. Everybody is not fortunate enough, as at Carcel Modelo, to be confined in a real prison. When supply exceeds demand, the penal authorities look about them and requisition empty buildings. "*Conventos, cuarteles, carceles*," say the Spaniards, in designation of the régime of M. Serrano Suner. Convents, barracks, prisons. The prison of Santa Engracia was a former convent of nuns, and a part of the building was still reserved for their use. There they kept an excellent school for orphan girls, and trained their novices. It was in the adjoining wing that the Belgian priest, stripped naked, endured his calvary of insult. In that wing Mass was said

with as much ceremony as at Barcelona. Four prisoners out of 1,900 performed their Easter duties. The remainder, at the moment of Elevation, muttered blasphemies. At Barcelona, out of 8,000 prisoners, the practising Catholics, including the sick under treatment in the Infirmary, numbered 60. But Torrijos was the pattern of a Spanish prison.

Father Van Nekker was transferred to Torrijos in view of his forthcoming extradition to Germany. The Nuncio had to make the most energetic representations to the government in order to prevent such a scandal, though even so he was referred back and forwards between the Departments of Foreign Affairs, Justice, War, and the Interior. And indeed the interrogation at Madrid had proved no more fruitful than the last, and the German agent at Madrid had merely replaced the one at Barcelona, who was considered to have been incompetent, and not without reason. The Germans claimed the Belgian priest, and the Spaniards, yielding to the Nuncio's remonstrances, kept him in the end. But what passes all imagination is that an intelligent, proud people like the Spaniards could have subjected a foreign Barnabite to the worst manifestations of the régime, deliberately initiating him into all its cruelty, horror, and abomination. Torrijos was the harshest prison in Madrid. It had been a convent and contained a handsome chapel. A space of 45 centimetres was allowed for each prisoner. Father Van Nekker was housed in the transept, under the rafters, which could only be reached on all-fours. The chaplain lived in the rood-loft where a little room had been arranged for his accommodation. It often happened that the executioner, when operating in the torture-chamber, went too far. Prisoners would emerge in a state of collapse, their eyes starting from their heads, their bodies bloated, and fall fainting on the floor. One evening a man of twenty-two, a neighbour of Van Nekker, came back in a dreadful state. . . . He had simply been subjected to the ordeal of the electric chair, and the executioner had inadvertently turned on too strong a current. The man died mad, a few weeks later.

And yet the chaplain inveighed from the pulpit against his congregation, accusing them of all the sins of Israel. But why—oh, why that insensate exhibition of all that was vilest in the history of Spain? What was the purpose of such revelations? And what evil demon impelled these men devoid of faith to inflict such martyrdom on other unbelievers, under the

pictured gaze of Him who said, "Peace to men of goodwill," and "Love one another"?

Thus Father Van Nekker became acquainted with all those condemned to death, and helped them in their last moments, passing from one convent to another, through the loveliest country in the world, a country which he never saw. For if we, in our Model prisons, could get a sight of the countryside, by hoisting ourselves up to the high cell windows, in the convent prisons it was impossible, for the glass in all the windows was obscured. Even at Torrijos the singing of the little pupils could be heard, though they remained invisible, and the Barnabite recognized the chatter of the novices at their recreation, those novices who waited so innocently for the execution squad, beyond the darkened windows, to provide them with some fresh orphans.

Fiery suns of August! Soup ladled out in blinding sunshine. Smell of blood and human misery. Echoes of the bastinado and cries of men in agony. Prisoners tottering out of the torture-chamber. Surely all this, like our own imprisonment, has the aspect of some incredible phantasmagoria devised by the Devil to entrap men's souls. Father Van Nekker constituted a living refutation of those who regarded the Roman Church as responsible for all these maniacal abominations. He, a prisoner, was a priest, and said Mass in edifying fashion. It is true that, but for the Papal Nuncio, the priests of Spain would have left him unaided.

Finally, after eight months in various prisons, the Belgian priest was sent to Miranda, always accompanied by an elegantly dressed escort, and travelling in the restaurant car.

That a victory so dearly bought, so agonizing a spiritual release, should have brought such degradation upon Spain, is a thing that baffles thought. That all the generous blood shed by so many gallant Catholics of Spain should have led to such subservience to the Gestapo, is one of the cruellest humiliations that a Christian soldier can conceive. I admit that when Father Van Nekker told me his story at Miranda, where I shared his hut, I felt, for the first time in many months, a vast melancholy, and a sense of something like frustration, take possession of my mind.

CHAPTER 9

Lost Revolutions

IF the population of that prison had been solely Spanish, it would have lost much of its interest. The political prisoners in 1942 were but humble folk, the rank and file of the Red Army. The rest, the intellectuals and the leaders, had got away to France, and thence to England, and above all to Mexico. Except Luner, the elegant Luner, all were in a place of safety. Azana, the President of the Republic, had died in exile, but in a comfortable bed. Negrin was in London: Araquistain and Alvarez del Vayo, Albornos and Largo Caballero, all these great men had carefully evaded imprisonment. Gone was the great Dr. Marano . . . father of the Republic: fled were all those high intellectuals, the glory of Red rule, Perez de Ayala, Ossoz y Gollardo, whom the Republic had so light-heartedly appointed as Ambassadors, and whose sole advantage from these embassies was to be able to remain at large in the day of disaster. Such crises of conduct are inevitable in all national upheavals. When the guns of repression began to thunder, Otto Bauer left Vienna, and Dollfuss's radio made haste to announce the fact to his dismayed soldiery. We ourselves have witnessed the emotion of the mob towards those who go, and are the only ones to go. The episode of the *Massilia* at Bordeaux is to be thus explained. If President Lebrun did not embark for England, it was mainly because he dreaded the agony of envy that would be aroused among his compatriots.

Moreover all the prisoners of the Carcel Modelo were obsessed by the idea that they had been "betrayed"—the tragic lament that invariably follows upon defeat. The herd of private soldiers, caught like rabbits in a warren, look around for their generals, and cry: "We hadn't time to fire a shot. Where are our leaders? Gone? Yes, we can guess why."

It was thus that the prisoners of the Carcel Modelo conceived what had happened. When I questioned Luner, he would answer genially:

"When the time comes, we shall have to establish a sound democratic régime. . . ."

"But you have already experienced its attractions."

"No, Spain has never had a democracy. . . ."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Never."

"And the *Frente Popular*?"

"Nonsense, the *Frente Popular* wasn't democratic. It said it was, but it wasn't. Were you deluded by all that nonsense? The chiefs of the *Frente Popular* were in bondage to the money powers; they never dared to do their duty, and bring in the laws they promised. What did they do about the agrarian problem, for instance? Nothing at all. Caught in the throes of their own disorder, they just played us a farce. I began as a Socialist. When I saw through their trickery, I became a Communist. And there I was when the brigade I was attached to was betrayed, surrounded, and had to surrender."

I gathered that the proof of all this was the fall of Madrid, when Beisteiro and General Miaja had capitulated unconditionally, as the result of traitorous negotiations, like Bazaine in Metz. All was not then lost at Madrid. The city could still have been defended. And the proof was that Beisteiro, the sage, the prophet of Spanish Socialism, the Iberian Vandervelde, the sage, had only been sentenced to thirty years' imprisonment. Why thirty years? By what strange freak had this impresario of revolutions not been condemned to death? The prisoners of the Carcel Modelo stood in no doubt. Beisteiro had been a traitor. He had indeed died in prison, but of old age and illness, in the infirmary, and in a bed. That was enough.

Added to these moral proofs were others, more material, and equally disquieting. After the armistice, Luner told me, sixty Curtiss aeroplanes had been discovered, only just shipped from America, which the Negrin government had not been at the pains to unpack. Oh, those sixty aeroplanes in the Barcelona hangars!—I knew them well enough. Franco's airmen had told me about them in the great moment of their victory. But such anomalies need cause no astonishment. We have all of us known other countries better "organized" than Spain, where, in the day of disaster, we were confronted with no less fearful revelations.

This was why Luner and his friends worked so eagerly for the establishment of Spanish democracy, of genuine and universal syndicalism. And it was then that the problem of the Anarchists arose.

It was always a matter of regret to me that I was only acquainted with the prison at Barcelona. I should have preferred the famous gaol of Montjuich, with its sinister moat, where Ferrer stood when the firing squad shot him in the face; though that was a long while ago, when such executions still made a noise in the world. Many of my friends had been there. But only a crime and a conviction could get a man into Montjuich. I, however, was neither accused nor sentenced. I was merely a prisoner in the Carcel Modelo. That was why the Anarchists were my best companions, but never at Montjuich, and this was a dividing line that was never crossed. There were Anarchists among us, haughty and reserved, watchful of each other and themselves. From the outside world they would sometimes receive very strange instructions. Now and again a message in the following terms would reach one of them in a food parcel:

"You are not observing Party discipline: take care. You have been seen in the company of Communists, or ordinary Moderates of the Republican Left. Do not forget that the Anarchist owes his whole duty to Anarchism, and must keep to his own kind."

And on his side, the Communist of the strict observance would find in a basket of bananas and Malaga grapes such a message as this:

"You must not forget your duties as a faithful Marxist. If you want the cause to conquer, always be on your guard, and do not frequent the society of Anarchists, who divide the Party. You are hereby called to order."

Such is the diversity of eternal Spain. It was understood among all the Republicans that no alliance was possible with the Anarchists, and that a democratic front could be formed without their adherence. To which they replied: "In that case, we shall be your enemies." Thus everything was made ready for the distractions of the future.

But the essential event, the ideal ever present in the minds of all, was that of an upheaval. A day would come, most glorious of all days, when guns could begin to speak. Germany beaten, Franco in flight, war in Spain—that was the programme. But what if the said upheaval was only partially achieved? What if Franco changed course towards England, and towards a demi-democracy? The mere notion of such a dispensation darkened every brow. If ever Franco should prove tolerant and reason-

able ! None dared conceive of such a horror. No more than that was needed to spread black despair. For in that case the prison would not be cleared for many years. It was essential that the prison-gates should open to the sound of rifle-fire, otherwise, revolution wasn't worth the trouble. When it was rumoured that Spain was about to come into the war, we felt a shock at our hearts. But the permanents, on the other hand, thrilled with delight. They knew very well that a national war would be no more than a civil war.

Which indeed is why it never happened.

The Spaniards argue—argue like men distraught. And the sick men among the prisoners were by no means the least voluble. The sick were housed in the Second Gallery, and we often shared their *patio* at exercise-time. Though, indeed, to say we shared it is a euphemism, for the congestion was such on those occasions that no one could move a step without bumping into a compact group of disputants, almost all of them old. Their Catalan tongue being almost incomprehensible to us, we used to get someone to translate it. What were they talking about ? Politics, of which they never tired. Every man had a cause to speak for—his own, and the story of how he had come to be where he was. That accursed bungled revolution had deposited them in the cells of the Second Gallery. They were all exactly like all the Spaniards I had known in exile, in Montparnasse and Brussels, in the cafés of the Place Sainte-Croix. They argued. They had many things to say to each other. And they spat. According to the gallery doctor, four hundred of them were tuberculous. On the fine sand, which was fairly often changed, they shuffled back and forward. Many of them could scarcely walk, and their sunken eyes glittered fearsomely in deep-hollowed sockets. Others always carried little wooden stools, and sat huddled in a sunlit corner, wiping away their spittle with slippered feet. Cropped and collarless, with the gnarled faces of the old, livid and unshaven, such as might lie outlined against a white pillow, the last before the shroud envelops it. There were men with one eye and men with one leg. All of them, even when walking in files, clung to the arms of others as old and decrepit as themselves. Thus they limped along in unison. But none were blind, and none, it need scarcely be said, were dumb.

On entering that yard, black with black clothes and black

skulls, a vast clamour rose upon the ears, like the howling of a storm. It was three o'clock in the afternoon. All the eastern side of the enclosure was thronged with the crowd of sick men, warming themselves, with their hands in their pockets, and spitting. Gradually the departing sun lengthened the huge shadow of the western wall. By half-past three it was gliding swiftly across the yard, and by five minutes to four there was barely a strip of light to walk in. Then the bugle sounded from inside the building, in the rotunda. The prisoners began to line up while the hubbub of discussions continued. Many of the sick men carried a stool in one hand, and with the other clung to another sick man's arm. Then, abruptly, silence fell. From the interior came the melancholy cadences of the second bugle-call. In the turn of a second, four hundred consumptives stopped talking politics.

Slowly the court of miracles was cleared.

CHAPTER 10

The Court of Miracles

LUXEMBOURG, Colonel Don Pablo, Major Botte, Major Pierre, and Captain Villaruel were the aristocrats of the Model Prison. They were political convicts of a superior calibre, foreigners for the most part, and none the less sentenced to twelve or thirty years because they had taken a more or less active part in the grand crusade of 1936. Among them, too, discussion was incessant, but more within our compass, since the arguments were presented in French, if not in the letter, at least in the spirit.

Luxembourg was a Parisian of the lower-middle class, a loud and vulgar type, son of a butcher and a butcheress in La Villette, and full of his own astuteness. Imagine a stocky, red-haired fellow, verging on fifty, talking by turns La Villette French, Chicago English, and Barcelona Spanish. From his own account his history was a worthy subject for a tale by Paul Morand. At twenty, sick of the parental trade, he had abandoned Paris, taking an old aunt with him, and launched into the great world. In America he had found a job with Fox Movietone in which he

had made a little money. At this point, indeed, his story was easily verified. Certain irregularities had crept into the Fox Movietone administration, and Luxembourg was found to be the culprit.

"There was a gang of us, and I took the knock for all of them. However, I didn't care. I got back to Europe, and took a job with the European branch of the same house. Once I was sent to St. Moritz to film a procession of de luxe ladies in de luxe hotels. I had to have some furs for that sort of thing: we collected them from the cloakroom and all the ladies helped me, delighted at a chance of getting their furs filmed. The idea was a torchlight procession at midnight. Well, I fixed it, but somehow all the expensive furs caught fire; but the ladies didn't mind. They had been filmed, and that made up for the furs. Some life, eh! Then I went to Spain, to Seville, where I found the most delightful little Seville girl, with adorable eyes. We met every day for a week, and when my assignment was over, I said good-bye. I wasn't bothering any more about her: but she had fallen madly in love with me, and fool that I was, I married her. And now she's in prison, too, at the Carcel de Mujeres. . . ."

At this point Luxembourg, much moved, and encircled by an audience which had for the moment stopped picking up cigarette-ends, would burst into fury and hurl the foulest abuse at Franco, the Money Powers, and the Priests. His wife caused him all the more anxiety, since, as was indeed generally known, she had involved him in various troubles which had no connection with politics, alas! It was a constant subject of obscene jokes among his friends, which met with perennial applause. Such was Luxembourg, the life and soul of the foreign section. In 1936 he had come to Barcelona to film actual events. He had shot scenes depicting meat and fruit being loaded on to aeroplanes (promptly unloaded after the operation), to demonstrate to Anglo-Saxon crowds that Spain was sending her last consignments of supplies to her intrepid warriors. Everything, as recounted by this international bagman, was transmogrified into farce, fraud, mystification, the lies of those who buy and sell, and of those who preach the betterment of man. None knew so well as he did, the sham battles organized by the great cinematograph companies, the mine-fields exploded for the benefit of Fox Movietone, in the suburbs of Barcelona two hundred miles

behind the front; the sham war, and the real war as well. Though the latter was bogus too, of course; had not Negrin and his gang sold the cause to Fascist bankers? He, Luxembourg, American scion of a La Villette butcher, knew what he was talking about. The defeat had caught him still in Spain, and when confronted with his accusers, he hadn't turned soft, he had spoken his mind, and pretty plainly too. "Yes, I'm an honest man, and I don't care what I say. . . . I hate all lies . . . which is why I am here for twelve years and a day. And the Boches had better come along quick and finish off the job. The world war was started here by those dirty double-crossers of Finance. . . . And, mark my words, they'll be for it soon enough. . . ."

It was the eternal *leit-motiv*, dear to all Spanish hearts. Since everything in the world begins and ends in the land of Spain, a land blessed by the heroes and the gods, the world war must of course have been conceived in Catalonia, Aragon, and Castile. I knew scarce a Spaniard who had any doubts upon the point. How many times, in the great days of freedom, had Franco's men said to me: "Here it was that the crusade against Bolshevism began. If you don't look out, you'll have the *Frente Popular* in your own country. We reconquered Spain from the Moors, we won the battle of Lepanto, and we discovered America. We are treading in the great tradition. We are liberating Europe. . . ."

And the Red would answer with a sigh, as we paced the great triangle of the Carcel Modelo:

"It was all the fault of you Anglo-French, who organized non-interventionism. Blum and Chamberlain would not crush Fascism outright, in Spain, in 1936. In 1939 they had to face it in their own countries. . . ."

Slowly the sun slid down the sky. Ominously the shadow moved across the sanded yard and marked the implacable passage of the minutes. We had begun to hasten towards the receding strip of gold, while the scavengers of cigarette-ends nosed around for any fragments that remained. Luxembourg, as excited as a man who had been drinking, though wine never entered the place except in measured drops, kept on whimpering:

"Of course, I don't mind anything for myself. It's my wife I care about. I have a great respect for my wife: and there she is, ill, in that filthy hole, and . . ."

The bugle sounded. The consumptives ceased to spit. The discussions were postponed until the morrow. But, back in the cells, they promptly broke out afresh.

There were a few men from Fiume, Italians who had taken part in d'Annunzio's adventure. One of them, a quiet, rather sallow little man, white-haired and bespectacled, was reputed to have been the great poet's Foreign Minister. I addressed him as Excellency, and he displayed no signs of annoyance. How on earth had this worthy little man, who would not have hurt a fly, come to be where he was? Simply and solely because of his demoniac addiction to politics. He had fallen out with Fascism, but had preserved his mania for being in the right. Instead of settling down to vines and olives in Lombardy, he had chosen the life of adventure and of controversy, the ultimate end of which was Spain, because the universal prerogative of all Spaniards is to be in the right. It was a rash move on his part. For Spain withdrew his registration card. Whither could he go? Neither Italy nor France would have him. These professional anti-Fascists carry with them through life the indelible imprint of their creed. He was in Spain without papers, like the rest of us, and, like the rest of us, Spain clapped him into gaol. But there was no land of freedom to claim him, and his sole choice was between gaol in Spain and gaol in Italy.

He preferred the Carcel Modelo in Spain, and to my mind he was right.

I often used to try and divert his thoughts by getting him to enlarge on Italian politics in the last twenty years. He came from Trieste, and I recalled the great part played by Suvich.

"Suvich, yes, a fellow-townsmen of mine, but a swine. . . ."

"And Sforza?"

"An intelligent man, but a swine. . . ."

Usually so voluble and vivacious, one morning I found him motionless and in tears. The authorities had just informed him of his wife's death and burial at Barcelona. The poor woman had departed without fuss or warning, and the police, all in the way of kindness, had duly informed the next of kin. The ex-Foreign Minister was weeping unobtrusively with his cap pulled down over his spectacles.

"The swine . . . the swine . . ." he muttered.

Next day, taking him by the arm, I tried to cheer him up a little. The war news was encouraging.

"Ciano seems in a tight corner," I ventured.

"Ciano's a swine. . . . And I'll tell you why."

The old man's face lit up. He was soon benevolent and beaming. He could talk politics again.

Then there was Don Pablo, another man of Fiume, also an unassuming personage, tall and emaciated, with a Don Quixote beard and moustache. A man of perfect dignity, colonel in the Regular army, and looking exactly what he was, a supremely elegant and finished man of arms.

There was Villaruel, a solidly respectable man, formerly member of the President of the Republic's bodyguard, a police officer by profession, versed in all the mysteries of Public Security. He had been appointed commandant of a Special Brigade, with the duty of guarding the person of the Chief of State, for which purpose he had taken a course of instruction in Paris. Eminent colleagues had there initiated him into the latest methods of protecting President Lebrun's invaluable life. It is common knowledge that the inoffensive President of a Parliamentary Republic is a favourite target for assassins. Sadi Carnot and Doumer fell by the bullets of such ruffians, while Mussolini and Franco appeared in safety, without asbestos or mailed shirts, in the streets and the balconies of public buildings. Villaruel knew how the assassination of Barthou at Marseilles could have been prevented, and, more particularly, how it was not in fact prevented.

The end of it all being a locked cell in the Carcel Modelo.

There was Batelle, whose father, two brothers, and a sister had fallen by the bullets of a firing squad. He himself, while under sentence of death, was one day told of his mother's death. Then he was reprieved. Did he owe his own life to this frightful hecatomb? Apparently he did. His unhappy mother's death, in the course of nature, had the effect of stopping the massacres. True it was that this aged Antigone had succumbed to the hardships of her life, so that her death might well have been set to Franco's account. Still, her obsequies did inspire the authorities with an access of an emotion very rare in Spain—pity. The whole episode was oddly reminiscent of a sentimental comedy. Many of the condemned men refused to believe in it at all. What! Was the Batelle family not to be wiped out? So a volley of machine-gun bullets was not to crash into that poor drawn face? Here was a strange miscarriage of events! Thus

Franco saved Batelle's life ; but Batelle never felt the smallest gratitude to him for doing so.

There was Major Pierre, a Breton of Quimperlé, domiciled in Spain for fifteen years, an old soldier of the Great War who had had the unlucky notion of re-starting it in Aragon, where he had been caught in the round-up of 1939. A kindly and unassuming personage, always wearing khaki shorts and puttees, and a cap, and an air of settled melancholy. His sole remaining vanity was his hair, which he carefully dyed with walnut juice. Indeed, walnut juice played a considerable part in his gloomy existence. Major Pierre, with the aid of a small penknife, was very dexterous at carving little wooden boxes, which he proceeded to polish with a rag soaked in walnut juice. The result was charming. Thus the day was spent. His labours over, he anointed his hair, his eyebrows, and his moustache with the selfsame walnut juice, and the satisfaction of this little dandiacal impulse provided him with the patience which sent him peacefully to sleep until next morning.

I would not like to say that these chemical operations were as effective on his hair as on his carved boxes. But in the lives of those sentenced to thirty years' imprisonment, each and every little oddity carries its own profound significance. Once a week the Major was summoned to the *Locutorio*, or parlour, and there he received alternate visits from two ladies, a mother and her daughter. Around these two deep-eyed Spanish ladies a whole legend had grown up. He was reputed to have been the lover of the first, and then of the second also. Two generations of Catalanes had sighed in his arms. Which explained why he anointed with walnut juice what remained of the hair which the mother—and, in due time, the daughter—had caressed and kissed. A disgusting story ! Sometimes when he went out into the *patio* in the rain a brownish liquid oozed down his temples and into his ears. It was reality taking its revenge. One day while he was being shaved the razor cut him, and the dye poisoned the wound. Which goes to show that life may not be cheated : we may indeed resort to cosmetics, the ultimate weapon of declining years, to help us in the fight against her, until we too must lie down to rest in a white wooden box, unadorned by any carving, and not admired by anyone at all.

There was a famous alienist doctor, head of a clinic at Barcelona. And a medley of well-to-do prisoners, always getting

presents from their families, and dogged, day in, day out, by the poorer inmates, ever on the watch for cigarette-ends. Colonel Bottai was a Regular soldier, a gunner, formerly attached to a French unit, who had taken refuge in Marseilles. There he went to see the Spanish Consul to ask him what was an officer's plain duty. The Consul answered :

"Your feelings do you credit. You were a captain in the Regular army before the revolution. Now you are a lieutenant-colonel in the Rebel army. The noble and generous Caudillo will restore you to your former rank."

Colonel Bottai gallantly returned to Barcelona and there resumed his rank as Captain of Artillery. Franco had kept his word. But Serrano Suner, always intent upon the political aspect of affairs, sentenced the Captain to thirty years' imprisonment, not in Montjuich, which is a military prison under the control of the Ministry of War, but in the Carcel Modelo, which is under the Interior.

There, in our great distressful confraternity, Captain Bottai resumed, in our eyes, his rank of lieutenant-colonel. I seldom met a more solid Spaniard, more devoid of affectation, and more utterly sincere. His view was that Franco, in 1936, had violated his honour and his military oath. The *Frente Popular* had undoubtedly had Spanish interests at heart. But Franco had behaved like an insubordinate officer, and to Monsieur Bottai, captain and colonel, discipline was a vocation : and one for which he had suffered in his own person.

There was the locomotive thief, a Spaniard to whom no one ever spoke : a strange gangster figure whose taste for a slashing stroke had acquired a truly American gusto. He appeared one day at Carcel Modelo, justly convicted beyond all doubt. A railway mechanic, he had conceived the idea of derailing three large locomotives, dismantling them, and selling them piecemeal. A few weeks later what should happen but that his accomplice joined our company. The purchaser of locomotives came to join the vendor. And, oddly enough, those who had dealings with locomotives received the special treatment of political prisoners, like ourselves, which was, it seemed, much superior to that of ordinary criminals.

No doubt they had connections among the Falangists. Indeed a Falangist spent some time with us, an authentic Falangist, convicted of an outrageous offence against decency. Instead of

in the criminals' gallery, he was put among the foreigners, as likely to provide him with more congenial company.

There was a Viennese Jew, a professor of languages, with a scrannel neck that gave him the air of a half-fledged crow, who had a mania for making his toilet in his *patio*. He pulled up his trousers, washed his legs, and then dried them in the sun, sitting on the ground; then he carefully brushed his ragged garments with a toothbrush. He looked like a bazaar Jew, or the proverbial Cairo cobbler. He scratched his bare legs, his large eyes uplifted to the sky, and then fell to searching very meticulously for fleas, always with the aid of a toothbrush.

A quartet of prosperous French business men, from Perpignan, languished in a cell which they had managed to make more or less habitable. No one, least of all themselves, knew exactly why they had been arrested. A native of Iraq, sentenced to three years for taking part in the revolution, served them as valet, cook, and *maitre d'hôtel*. There was also a young official from the Ministry of Justice who had set up as a blackmailer. He used to call on wealthy families who had compromised themselves one way or another, and say: "Take care, you are on the black list. But I can fix it for you. . . ." And he did so, to such purpose that he ended up in prison. But as a Falangist, he was allowed the same favoured treatment as ourselves. Giovanni, the Italian, a handsome and delightful young man, a virile, sturdy figure, had been awaiting his sentence for the last two and a half years. His great fear was that he might be returned to Italy.

"I'm so sad, Captain," he would say to me, "so very sad. . . . I was a soldier in the Civil War. I did a lot of running in the war. We Italians all run very well. I always lived at Barcelona: then I was called up by the Republic. I had to run a great deal in the retreats. . . ."

"Forward, Giovanni? . . ."

"No, backward, Captain. And now what? To Italy again, I suppose. . . . Which is the safest job in the army, do you think?"

"The Infantry, Giovanni, you can get away quickest. You can run."

"Run? Ha-ha-ha, Captain!"

He roared with laughter at his excellent joke; a handsome, genial fellow, as light and charming as a song-bird, or an Italian

utterly out of key among all these Spaniards, as grave and sententious as owls and crows, and all so confoundedly courageous.

Panama was a sailor from Panama, married to a woman of Marseilles, a buxom matron whose photograph he was always very ready to produce. He had voyaged everywhere, and talked of latitudes and longitudes, of oceans and great cities, like the simple soul he was. Indeed, he was in fact a very simple soul who had traded in oranges from Barcelona to Marseilles during the war. He had been to Singapore and to the Cape, to Antwerp, and to Honolulu. Never did I hear him say a foolish thing. Unable to write, he had read a great deal. We used to write his letters to his wife for him, and he repaid me for the service by washing my underclothes. I have seldom met a more perfect gentleman. What pleasant acquaintances all these people would have been anywhere but in a prison !

They had their love-affairs and their intrigues. Some never talked of them : others talked of little else. Many of them signalled from the *patio* yard to the brown-haired beauties who could be descried on the balconies opposite. Thus during the exercise-hour there were elaborate interchanges in Morse with those bright-eyed dames, who, from their points of vantage, duly responded. Letters followed, replete with solemn or sentimental adjurations. The luckiest were those with windows near the wall, above the wash-house. From the actual windows of their cell they could converse by means of gestures. One of them had discovered an Austrian girl. Never have I observed a flirtation so ardent, hectic, and intense. The Austrian girl lived on the fifth floor, much higher than the highest wall, and not really very far away. Often she would come forth like an idol, a goddess treading upon clouds. Her aspirant in the *patio* would at once move slowly towards her, waving his hands as he approached. When he touched the foot of the wall, he turned and came back with his hands in his pockets, right up to the further front wall. Another turn, and he was facing the outer wall again. Yonder was his beauty once more, and he walked towards her, stretching out his hands and grinding his teeth in the ardour of desire.

How he gloried in his triumph, what ecstasy of emotion glittered in his eyes ! In the evening it was better still, when, by the aid of a lighter and a cigarette, he could converse from his

window in the darkness by a numbered code. Four times, five times, he inhaled slowly, then in a quick succession of puffs. That little intermittent red glow could mean all sorts of things, such as: "I love you a little . . . a great deal . . . passionately . . . not at all . . . madly." Ten cigarettes were consumed in these proceedings.

He went to bed at last, enchanted. The Austrian girl loved him: he was sure of it; his jealousy was cured. Adorable delusion! I fancy that the Austrian girl rather laughed at the affair, though she did not let him think so. There was never a far-off Princess who was not ravishing, even though she be severed from her poet-lover by the infinite distance of a prison wall.

And each day sounded the trumpet of the dead. Silence came upon the cells. The inmates eyed each other. A man died every day in that village of eight thousand inhabitants.

CHAPTER II

Monsieur Blondel

ONE day about noon, when a few rays of sunshine were filtering fitfully into my cell, I observed near the door, seated on the mattress, a tall man of remarkably distinguished appearance, pale-complexioned, who was picking bread and fruit out of a yarn sack. How old could he be? Fifty at most. But when he took off his beret I noticed he was bald, and that what remained of his hair was white. It was not until later on that he told me he was sixty-two. He seemed to pay no more than a discreet attention to our conversation. I noticed that he invariably talked to the warders in excellent Spanish, with a faint Andalusian accent. To us he talked French, a pure and genuine French of France, quite beyond imitation. I asked him quietly where he came from, and he told me: Nantes. I asked him if he knew the recipe for duck *à la Nantaise*. He paused, as though to make sure of not uttering an imbecility, and answered gravely: "I must admit that I don't, but I am a vegetarian."

Now I knew Nantes a little, Schwob's *Loire Lighthouse*, and

his scheme for a navigable Loire, and the strange railway which runs right through the town between two rows of eighteenth-century houses built by the rich slave-owners of old days. I envisaged the Carrier *noyades*, the Chouans, and the house of Aristide Briand; not far away the Vendée of Charette and Clemenceau; and the Loire, the gigantic and torrential Loire, a Valois river at Tours, Huguenot and Leaguer at Saumur, emerging into civil war at Nantes. This man of Nantes had known many people in France; and he had lived in California and Mexico. I felt I had met the man somewhere: the general look of him was familiar to me, though I did not recognize his face. He knew a great deal about horses, coming as he did from the West, particularly thoroughbreds, and as I had long meditated a history of the horse throughout the ages, I collected an ample harvest of information on the Breton pony, the Concarneau horse-fair, the Anglo-Norman, and especially—which was quite new to me—the Spanish horses of America, the descendants of the ancient *cartujeros* brought over by the Conquistadors of Pizarro and Hernando Cortes. The love of horses, like the love of women, is an inexhaustible theme. This impressionable Frenchman told me quite casually that as an engineer, specializing in hydraulic work, he had travelled a great deal. Moreover, he had been a naval officer in the last war, on very special service, for, having been a great deal in Andalusia since 1900, his knowledge of Arabic and Spanish had been found indispensable on and about that sea once sailed by the bark of the astute Ulysses.

He was the sort of man who always took his time to answer a question. He would never deal with a problem except by reference to its cause. Why had he been imprisoned at Montjuich, an exclusively military prison, and then at the Carcel Modelo? He had been there for nearly four months, but in solitary confinement, under the system known as *incomunicado*, which had caused him extreme mental torment. I will call him, for the convenience of this narrative, Monsieur Blondel. For several months he filled a large place in my life. He had the habit of getting up early, and in the morning, as I lay on my warm pallet, my mind a-quiver with every sort of curiosity, M. Blondel used to talk in a way that made me want to sing. He knew by heart the *Conquerants* of Heradia, that panorama of the great days of the *Descubrimiento*, when the captains and their

fighting men left Palos de Monguer. We ceased to heed the shouts of the frozen-footed warder on his morning round, his filthy soup, the deeds done upon our fellow-men by those possessed of authority—we had all of us fled away in thought on the magic carpet of the Eastern fabulist. For two hours we were far, far away. The walls of the cell were foul, but the horror of them faded from our vision in the dim illumination from the ceiling, and the all-pervading dirt was no more than a distant recollection. Added to which M. Blondel had a passion for music.

M. Blondel knew by heart the librettos of all the operas in vogue, and he actually made me understand the plot of *Tosca*, which I had never really taken in. When Mario points out a well to Tosca, which in fact is Angelotti's dungeon, and when Mario passes his beloved with blood-stains on his brow, I was generally intent on the music. In *Carmen*, I had forgotten that Don José, the lieutenant of Dragoons, deserts the army and becomes a smuggler previous to stabbing his mistress for abandoning him for a bull-fighter. I wasn't attending to the dramatic interest of the plot, I was thinking only of the aria—*Si tu m'aimais*. And Mimi and Musette, and La Teinturière, in *Bohème*, and Mignon, who fell into the hands of the rope dancers—all this seemed incredibly remote . . . and Faust, ridiculously rejuvenated, pausing on the threshold of the castle where Marguerite is singing as she spins. It was all Montmartre of all the ages that came back to me and murmured in my ears. In the evening the little sergeant of Zouaves would tell us stories of the garrison life at Mogador, the market-place thronged with Portuguese Jews, and houris of very easy charms. M. Blondel knew how to listen. He volleyed questions at me, and I told him about my trip to Gao and Tchad, and my interviews with Dollfuss, the Tsar of Bulgaria, Franco, Hitler, Mussolini, King Albert, and Pope Pius XI. The bugle sounded for the daily round of tasks. Interminable files of sick men and consumptives, some seared with every sort of vice, some mere unfortunates, formed up in the *patio* or the gallery—we barely noticed them. Ramirez was as stupid as an ass. M. Blondel used to quote a Mexican Gaucho proverb to the effect that a stupid man and a white horse can recognize each other from very far away.

Being a Breton, Blondel knew the Mississippi valley in the

manner of Chateaubriand, as a poet would, but he knew it also as a man of the material world, for by virtue of his geological experience he had become an expert prospector for gold. When he saw that he was becoming too technical, he would change the subject and descant on Peleus, who commanded his nephew Jason to recover the Golden Fleece from the King of Colchis, which gave occasion for richly-coloured analogies between industrial reality and the symbolism of the great Myths. Pierre Dac was then domiciled in our cell, and that master of mad laughter brought into the company all the gloom and melancholy of those who, never having known adventure, suffer grievously from the pain of that regret.

Thus we drew near to Christmas. We were now acclimatized, moulded to the shape and pattern of that abode of Force where we were caught and held. Never had I made nor hinted the faintest gesture of revolt against our guardians. None the less I had never ceased to gnaw pretty savagely at my bit. But all that was at an end. There was nothing for it but to bend to the outer forces, and achieve a conquest over those within. No word of lamentation ever passed our lips.

Once, and once only, a vast access of misery swept over the prison, when the authorities decreed, from motives of humanity, that the married prisoners and fathers of families, instead of getting a mere sight of their children in the parlour from a distance, through a barred barrier with warders present, might see them from near by and take them in their arms. Thus it was done. But that evening too many poor fellows lay upon their mattresses and sobbed. . . . Which goes to show that men of heart and kindness are not the most enduring. They are sad when they love, and are able to express affection. That parlour, even under ordinary conditions, was a scene of horror. Four hundred persons in an immense gallery, like the monkey-house at the Zoo, talking at the top of their voices to the men in the cage, and ultimately yelling in the effort to make themselves heard. The place soon became a pandemonium, a market in full cry, a vociferating mob clutching passionately at the intervening bars. Then indeed it was made plain that prisons were not devised to hold half the population of a country. Prisons must needs exist, but only for a few unfortunates, like hospitals. We could read, in *Redencion*, the chronicle of events in the land of prisons, the story of the prisoners' children, the hundreds

of thousands of semi-orphans whom the State, having gaoled their parents, took into its charge, a formidable social problem which Spain, an easy-going sort of country, obviously had not the means to solve. M. Blondel knew these things, and pondered them as we did. Sometimes insensate rumours reached us, promptly believed and put about, which, though soon disproved, left their marks behind them. Thus, on December 20th, 1941, everybody believed quite seriously that the Allies had landed at Dakar and Oran, and that the French Staff had boarded the English fleet. We were wrong, by the space of barely eleven months.

Often, on returning from our walk in the *patio*, we found intruders in our cells. Our company had only recently been reduced from eight to four, as the result of some departures, when the *vigilantes* abruptly thrust three new-comers upon us. They were discovered sitting on the floor beside their little bundles. The first reaction among the original inmates was one of irritation and impatience. Who were these cropped and shaven strangers still wearing ordinary hats? Then we introduced each other. They were Belgians of course. One of them gave me one day a complete account of the doings of my profession in Belgium. I passed from one name to the next. Every journalist was mentioned. Last of all:

"What about Charles d'Ydewalle?" I asked.

"One of the very best. But he disappeared; he must be in the country somewhere, near Bruges."

I fell back on my mattress in high good-humour. M. Blondel at my side laughed consumedly.

In the evening I gave lessons in languages to the warders, in a damp cell, so damp that the moisture oozed in great drops down its walls. It was a place where no one ever laughed. Many Spaniards gathered there to see Pierre Dac, and asked him to sing a little song, but Pierre could no longer find it in his heart to laugh: each of us, and each of them, had to find within himself the fount of all courage and all joy. Fortunately M. Blondel, in the course of disquisitions on Spanish history, explained to me most lucidly the evolution of the Arab style into the *mulejar*, *plateresco* into the *chirrigüesco*. And indeed I cannot but admit that in the company of such a man the passage of the hours became quite endurable. One sole anguish still possessed us: when should we be transferred to Miranda?

Yes, when? And one torment, the only real one—the fear of the future, was with us always.

And yet, and after all, wasn't the life more real, more in conformity with our ultimate ends, than our present lives? Four days a week we were confronted with the great scenario of death, and at every instant the awful apprehension of what might be to come, of something we knew not what. Those sentenced to the machine-gun, whose fate so tore our hearts, were they in fact any more truly under sentence than we were, except that the ultimate reckoning was to confront them sooner? That was the only difference. Would our last hour be any more agreeable than that of the condemned prisoner in the Carcel Modela? Was it better to die in a bed one day, beside a table littered with medicine bottles, at the close of an exhausting and devouring malady, half-conscious and anguished by all manner of humiliating infirmities, to which death alone could put an end? The sole point was that those sentenced to the machine-gun departed quicker. Fate seized them sooner; indeed, in something of a hurry. Apart from that, a machine-gun is certainly preferable to a hospital.

As for the tedium of the present hour, were we adequately conscious of it? In prison, life alone was left to us: that and nothing more. And that life did not bring us contentment. We yearned after another life, a real life, in which we should at last know love and happiness. All this has been described by Pascal in magnificent language, because Pascal was one of those very rare spirits who understood the meaning of destiny and pondered on it all their lives, unaided by the symbolism of life in a prison, even in a Model Prison. He did not need to contemplate daily the procession of those condemned to die, in order to remind himself that he too was one of them, as are we all.

But M. Blondel was taken from us as the result of a redistribution of cells, and housed with the little weasel-faced Marseillais, the Roumanian thief, two Italian butchers convicted of selling damaged meat, the Panama sailor, and two deserters from the Legion. Then he was restored to us, always gallant, and always indefeasibly distinguished. The Marseillais would tell fantastic stories about Salviani's electoral campaigns in the good old days, which were much appreciated by M. Blondel. Then he told me more about Mexico, New York in 1900, and

Madrid under the regency of Maria-Christina, and once again he recited the "Conquerors" of Heredia: "... Like a gerfalcon swooping on its prey" . . .

Sometimes he would recite the legends of his own Armorica, or sing the old songs of my native Flanders:

" Watch out upon the yellow heath,
See—the dance is led
By the little pixies
To the measure of the creaking
Of the chariots of the dead."

And next morning, at dawn, four condemned men would depart, to the sound of faintly creaking doors, towards the prison van in which no man returns.

One trifling solace soothed my personal pride. The Fifth Gallery was provided with an old collection of the *Revue Générale*. This was a Brussels monthly, a solid and rather pompous publication to which I had contributed for more than ten years. M. Jottard, the Belgian Consul-General at Barcelona, obtained Don José's permission for a set of twelve numbers to be presented to the Fifth Gallery. There they found their way from cell to cell: indeed they were sought after as eagerly as if they had been consecrated bread. The prisoners pored over all manner of informing little articles, which otherwise would never have crossed the Belgian frontier, except perhaps to provide evening reading for our Consulates and diplomatic missions abroad. In the process of passing through so many hands, the copies had shed a page or cover here and there, so that the end pages were exposed, containing the alluring advertisements of the Desclée de Brouwer publications, or, in large type: "Banque de Bruxelles: Capital, Sixty Million Francs". And in the list of contents appeared: "CHARLES D'YDEWALLE: Evolution of the British Monarchy," which pleased me, just as a duke, lost in the turmoil of a railway station, must be delighted to hear a porter say: "Good morning, Your Grace." In default of other matter, the prisoners read Charles d'Ydewalle. Moreover, the Belgian Ministers, MM. Pierlot and Spaak, fugitives indeed and stripped of their possessions, also had their hour of fame in those same cells. In their flight from Barcelona in 1940 they had left some luggage in the charge of M. Jottard, which included some shirts and suits. Trenchantly cut down

and adapted, a suit of Mr. Spaak looked very neat on a Belgian aviator. And the shirts, marked "Hubert Pierlot" on the collar, enjoyed a period of notable success. These prisoners had long weeks of experience behind them. They rolled their cigarettes themselves, and manufactured a new one out of three discarded ends.

CHAPTER 12

"*Arriba España*"

THE gravest charge that I can bring against General Franco's policy is that it created its own counter-propaganda. Spain is a closed domain, with a life so little known to the rest of the universe that, under an astute government, it can remain undiscovered. A harsh, mysterious land, always seething with adventure and odorous of gunpowder. In 1942 armed bands were scouring the Asturias and the outskirts of Granada. The Alpujarra country, celebrated by Théophile Gautier as a haunt of highwaymen, was once more overrun by elusive marauders. The Spain of ambushes and highway robbery had come back to glorious life. It was indeed the picturesque and splendid Spain of ancient days, except that machine-guns had replaced the blunderbuss. I knew more than one young soldier who, his haversack stuffed with provisions and a well-lined belt, was simply held up in the mountains and relieved of all he had. After my release, I was travelling between Seville and Madrid with a member of the *Seguridad* police who calmly described to me the life these bandits led. "Are they well armed?" I asked him. "Better than we are, anyway," he replied. "They rob you with the utmost politeness and a smile, and never so much as a single word. Sometimes they descend on a village and sack it. And that's not all. On one occasion a battalion of young troops on manœuvres was caught unawares in bivouac and annihilated. Most regrettable. It is no good trying to resist them. What can one do? They're dangerous fellows. Round them up? Impossible."

Such was the talk of a policeman to a foreign prisoner lately

released. Alas, all through that eight months of captivity, the prisoners learnt a number of other things about the régime of M. Serrano Suner. Why does Spanish justice take a delight in exposing its mortal weakness to the casual foreigner?

It would have been so simple to consign foreigners to a special prison where, not knowing what Spain was really like, they would have had time to bemuse themselves with conjectures. Spaniards, as everyone knows, are possessed by a pride that is always on the alert. At the merest trifle, Whites or Reds will take offence; their national honour is at stake. No people are more susceptible to the prick of a pin, the tap of a fan, and especially to the stab of a pen. None the less, all those months while the blood-stained hands of the police had me in their grip, the régime lost no opportunity of acquainting us with its abominations and even its absurdities. Had they wanted to impart to an inquisitive journalist all that it would be most inconvenient for him to know, they could not have done better. Truth to tell, I did not want to study Spain. I was eager to be elsewhere. The Spanish police made it a point of honour to hold me and spare me nothing. Imagine the perversity of stopping a foreign journalist on his way to England, and putting him into the principal prison of the place, in the gallery of those condemned to death. Face to face with that array of pitiful victims, we, the foreign prisoners, were housed, that is to say precisely those who ought surely to have been put somewhere else. The prison authorities decreed it: and here we lived in exact alignment with our opposites. Front-row stalls for foreigners. And indeed it was so. In ten or twenty weeks they would, and did, learn everything there was to learn, language, customs, the ritual of justice, and the whole paraphernalia of official assassination in Spain, 1942. Added to which, a large part of the prison staff was composed of prisoners who, in their loathing of the régime, were only too ready to dilate on all its horrors.

It would not have mattered so much if the foreign prisoner had been kept in gaol for good and all. But no, he would be released when his education was complete. A stay of eight months is quite long enough to get to know a country reasonably well. This same foreigner would be made acquainted with the bullies, perverts, maniacs, murderers, and, above all, with the political criminals of Spain. Before two months were out,

the warders, doctors, gendarmes, and inspectors had fully enlightened me on every point which, for the reputation of Spain, I ought never to have been allowed to know. The foreigners possessed of all this information were then transferred from all the prisons of Spain to one sole concentration camp, where they could conveniently exchange their views. Such was the function of Miranda camp.

The humbler staff of the prison, carriers of soup and coffee, was composed solely of prisoners. Prisoners too were the sweepers and hospital orderlies. So also were the clerks, the chief among them acting as sergeant-major. A model Falangist, but under lock and key. Our Fifth Gallery, with its underground and upper cells, contained quite a thousand people. The foreigners, of course, performed no menial tasks. They were there solely to take what came to them, and to look on. One solitary officer of the guard, in uniform, sufficed to manage this enormous flock. Sometimes, during the day, several officers relieved each other. These uniformed officials were very diverse in origin and quality. At night one only remained to sleep, which he did without uneasiness. The barred gate was shut. He alone possessed the key. The door of every cell was bolted. The distant sentries on the passage-way that topped the encircling wall exchanged their long-drawn-out responses every quarter-hour—"Alerta . . . alerta"; and their lugubrious cries, punctuating the chimes of a neighbouring steeple, marked the desolate passage of the hours. In the morning the sweepers emerged from their cellars unannounced. The bugle from the rotunda blared its morning call. The coffee on its little trollies appeared at a fixed hour. The bolts shot back. Keys creaked in the locks. And finally the officer of the guard condescended to slip on a tunic and a pair of trousers over his pyjamas, and stroll past the open doors of the cells. His clerk, with a roster in his hand, rapped out the number of inmates of each cell. A thousand men until that moment had lived with no guardian eye upon them. From nine in the evening until eight in the morning one sleeping official sufficed to impose authority on a thousand vigorous men, a full battalion in number, nearly all of whom had fought in the field and savagely awaited the moment when they could fight again. Not once did any incident disturb the serenity of those black nights. The sole possible mishap was that a sick prisoner

might be taken violently ill in his cell. It was useless to shout for help. There was no one on duty in the rotunda, and the officer on guard, even supposing any cries could have reached him, would not have awakened. In that event, the sick man would have died untended, of an attack of appendicitis, for instance.

Or a brawl might break out among the inmates of a cell. Well, they must settle it themselves. That did happen sometimes, but the fights were merely fisticuffs. For a long time past, knives and sticks, and even stones and bottles, had not been allowed in a Model Prison. We sometimes kept a little water in a bottle, but the bottles were regretfully removed: "Sorry, it's forbidden by the regulations." Model Prison! And it was true. I would never have believed that so many men could have been kept in prison by such simple means. No warders in a Model Prison, merely bars.

Our mattresses bore the initials of the prison, P.C.B.—*Prison Celular Barcelona*; and C.M.—*Carcel Modelo*. Moreover, the expression had passed into the language. A man was in the Model. So-and-so had been for a month, or a year, in the Model. If upon occasion the regulations were evaded, it was always to the profit of the prisoners. A man from the nether quarters often managed to make his way into our gallery, after nine at night. He had squared the guards. The bolt slid back, a grotesque head appeared, and he proffered us his wares. It was, of course, an *estraperlisto*, a black marketeer. But those escapades did not disturb the established order of the Modelo, for he came and went like a shadow, blacker than the night itself, nor did anyone ever seize the opportunity to get out of the gallery. Indeed he was a veritable embodiment of the *estraperlo*, the black market.

In so extensive a phalanstery all the prisoners were, in appearance, dealt with on a footing of equality, received the same ration of coffee, money, soap, and tobacco, got up and went to bed at the same time throughout their imprisonment. But beyond all this, what differences there were!—all of which were born of money, which soon exerted its power upon us all, and ultimately prevailed upon the warders themselves. Be it said that in every prison, since prisons first existed, everything can be bought. Prices become established, and each sort of

traffic produces its specialists, among whom, naturally, Catalans and Jews predominate. In Spain a Catalan stands for a Jew or a tradesman, the Spaniard being by his nature indifferent to such matters, and indeed to anything that can be described as business. He must have money, quickly, so that when the moment comes he may appear to take no thought for it. That is why the immense natural resources of the country are exploited by foreign concerns, French, English, Belgian, or American. The only people who neglect them are the Spanish themselves. As the war continued, privation in Spain increased, because the Spaniards had never thought of organizing a system of supply. And Spanish foreign policy, in its vassalage to Germany, did the rest. Fortunately or unfortunately, the black market or *estraperlo* impounded what surplus there was, and the wealthy Spaniard, throughout the whole period of famine in Europe, could get all he wanted. It was sold surreptitiously, but consumed in public. In Madrid the bread ration was 80 grammes, but for fifty pesetas you could get a three-course dinner openly and without coupons. Elsewhere, in Brussels and in Paris, these luxuries were procurable, but only by rather circuitous means. In Madrid no such devices were needed. At the Ritz an admirable jazz band discoursed intoxicating tangos to the most elegantly dressed women. Never, according to astonished English observers, had there been more brilliant parties. To the strains of that same jazz, the crowd in the street danced also. Through open windows the music floated into the soft night air, and the mob picked it up like pennies as it passed. There is no luxury so insolent that does not find its beneficiaries among the poorest of the poor.

The Carcel Modelo was fashioned in the image of that world also. The rich prisoner could get everything he wanted. The daily ration of bread was 200 grammes. Bread was normally sold at two *pesetas* the ration, except on the 1st, the 10th, and the 20th of each month, for on those three dates the authorities distributed to each prisoner his ration of forty cigarettes. When cigarettes began to grow scarce, bread fell in price, and tobacco rose. Often and often I saw bread sold for tobacco. And all this went on all the time. There were days without bread—that is, without contraband bread. And in contrast to what went on in town, or, as the Spaniards say, "in the street," all this traffic was forbidden. It did but thrive the more vigorously.

CHAPTER 13

The Ghetto

THE Jews, German for the most part, had secured their claim to a monopoly of this sort of trade, and in the foreigners' gallery we had adopted two such traffickers, who were also our protégés, the kind of Jews that in Austria-Hungary of old days used to be called by the aristocracy *Schützjuden*.

One of them enjoyed a veritable authority over the various taskmen of the prison, orderlies, sweepers, and even warders. He would not suffer bread to be sold nor cigarettes exchanged without his sanction. An odd little creature about thirty years old, native of Einsleben in Thuringia, Luther's town, with a grimacing visage that might have escaped from a canvas by Jerome Bosch. He was known as Erik. He was shaped like a seal, his head hunched between his shoulders, his eyes set so near his nose that they looked almost to be touching: thick hair, which grew violently despite much prison cropping, and began not far from his eyebrows. When he lost his temper and brandished his stunted arms, we used to say: "Look out. There's Erik flapping his wings." And the younger ones would shout: "*Coua . . . coua*." When he sat crouching over some task of cobblery or darning, he had the air of a gargoye. And he was not infrequently told so:

"Erik, with horns and a tail, you'd look just in place on the pinnacles of Notre Dame. . . ."

It was true. Persecuted by the Nazis, he had left his native Thuringia in 1936 and discovered Catalonia. He could talk Catalan, Spanish, and a little French. I never knew exactly what he had been up to in Spain during the years of Civil War, but he was reputed to have been commissary to a brigade, which would have been a matter for surprise. Anyway, he had upon his conscience all that was needed to get himself shot. In the spring of 1941 he managed to get himself arrested in the company of a group of foreigners. The latter merely passed through the Modelo. There was no one interested in Erik. Like so many Jews, he could have repeated the lamentation of the *Zohar*: "We are always on our travels: but, alas, we are never expected anywhere."

Never was anyone quite so impudent as that Jew. He did little jobs for the prison staff, kept the card index, distributed the cigarette ration, and collected letters. In a word, he had known how to make himself indispensable. He was the born intermediary. Arrogant in success, abject when rebuffed. He conducted a lively traffic in wooden baskets, which we owed to the generosity of the Consulates, who used them for packing the provisions they sent in to us. Erik calmly asked the new arrivals for their wooden baskets in exchange for a few good offices, and this gradually became a matter of routine. Added to which the Consulates took pity on him, and as he was highly recommended by Catalonian revolutionary circles, he too received relief from England, and appeared at the distributions of fruit, preserves, and cakes. He had the true prehensile touch, and finally annexed all those white slat-sided baskets. In such affairs, possession equals ownership. We rid our cells of any wood that might harbour bugs, and besides we were not born with his mercantile mentality. Many prisoners used the wooden laths for firing. Which won us Erik's favour.

At the end of two months we began to be annoyed by this little game. Erik no longer asked for the baskets, he demanded them as of right. He came into my cell at the regulation hour and shouted: "*Caja!*"

One Wednesday, on which day our provisions were distributed, I initiated a local revolution; Erik having set down the full basket, quietly remarked, with the air of a gentleman giving orders to his butler:

"I'll come and take away the empty in a quarter of an hour."

I knew what was in his mind. He was going to sell it to an infirmary orderly, who did not dare to ask me for it.

A quarter of an hour later Erik returned. The bolt clicked. . . . Erik was in a hurry: He merely snapped out:

"Basket."

I answered: "No."

"Why?"

"Because I want it."

"That basket's mine."

"No, it's not."

"I have promised it to a friend."

"I can't help that."

"I'm giving it to him."

"No, you aren't."

At this point the seal-like visage became apoplectic. He was furious, and he was completely dumbfounded. He paused and glared at me. I had resumed my reading of Homo's history of Rome. The Jew swung round and departed, in a state of utter bewilderment.

That same evening I gave the *caja* to the orderly in question.

What astonished me most in this simple Jewish tale, and there must have been many, many thousands like it in the last few thousand years, was mainly the insolence of the successful Jew, his effrontery when fortune favours him, and especially his servility when he meets his master. It never occurs to him that he might fall in with someone who would counter him at his own game. A disconcerting race, and always will be, I suppose.

Indeed, the story of the *cajas* is a veritable epitome of prison days and occupations. It was the subject of much comment among the inmates of the Fifth Gallery, and each day brought its own little incident. This same Erik had a boorish love of a brawl. In the recreation yard, scarcely had the prisoners fallen out of rank than he tried, by means of well-directed shove or kick, to start a scuffle in a corner of the yard, among the more ruffianly elements of our population. The swaying combat was soon ringed by derisive onlookers. It was a rough-and-tumble sort of a fight, just for the fun of the thing, and accompanied by much uproarious laughter. The fundamental brute that lies dormant in so many awoke and dashed into the fray, in which all the rabble among us were soon embroiled. Wildest of them all was poor Ramirez, the Mongol-headed cotton operative from Barcelona. He was one of those who brought round the soup in the mornings, and in the daytime he acted as warder. He would have looked quite at home with a knife between his teeth, dancing to a Balalaika orchestra in a Montmartre café. In the *patio* at exercise-time he just fought, and laughed. Nothing he liked better than rolling on the ground. Then the bread-sellers began their rounds. They produced from their pockets large 25-ounce *chuscos*. The said pockets were very, very far from being clean, but we did not inspect them too closely. It was bread, smelling fragrantly of maize-flour. Real bread, which some were so demented as to exchange for tobacco. There were always some crumbs of tobacco in the vendors' pockets, which stuck to the bread. As the

10th or the 30th of the month drew near, there was plenty of bread to be had, as the need for tobacco became more insistent. Prisoners of our kind received thirty-five *pesetas* from their Consulates every week. Five *pesetas* a day, enough for the Jews to regard us with interest, while the warders, mostly poor folk from Valencia or Reus, eyed us with embarrassing intensity. Carcel Modelo contained a good number of well-to-do prisoners.

But many of our friends had experienced the delights of Figueras and Gerona, frontier towns, furtive and inglorious little gaols, full of petty smugglers and poor rustics to whom thirty-five *pesetas* was a fortune. Foreigners were disliked there, because frontier Spain was violently Francophobe at the time, and regarded everything emanating from France as the veritable foe. They were allowed no more than their bare ration of soup, and they were always relegated to the tail-end of the queue. The chilly leavings were their portion. Was a packet of cigarettes or a loaf of bread missing, oddly enough it was always the foreigner's ration which had disappeared. There were no Model prisons at Figueras and Gerona. We, on the contrary, lived in a Model prison, quite near the Consulates. The Governor held sway over eight thousand men, the strength of an infantry brigade. The foreigners were the star inmates of the establishment. The prisoners themselves all clustered round them, and made frantic efforts to talk to them in English or French: just as in the army, old regular sergeant-majors in barracks like to talk familiarly to the young cadets who are merely passing through. Many of the prisoners scarcely dared accost us, intimidated by our clean clothes and our high reputations. We had to address them first, as one good fellow to another, talk to them about the war and the forthcoming British victory, offer them cigarettes, which they would only accept after much deprecation and many polite excuses, for none knows the intense susceptibility that may lurk in the Spanish character. The most plebeian among the foreigners were liked because they refused to be put upon. The other foreigners were respected for being decently dressed. Many Spaniards engaged in the *estraperlo*, and found us good customers. The others were too proud to enter into the game, and so were we. That is why they got on with us so well.

In this cosmopolis there were Jews of the type of Erik, who

made money. There were also Jews who spent it, such as a gentleman by the name of Hirschberger, and very appropriately so named. When I heard his name, it seemed to me so natural, so consonant with Mr. Hirschberger's character—he was a banker and financial journalist at Prague—that I seemed to have known it all the time. He was a Jew and a Pan-German. When he talked about Germany he said "we." Certainly he made no excuses for Hitler. However, he put his beloved Germany before everything, with the result that he managed to unite against him the opposing factions of the Falangists and the Republicans. He was growing grey, and so bent as to be almost hunchbacked, indeed he looked as though all the blows he had had to bear since childhood had submerged his head into his shoulders. His voice was nasal and harsh, his complexion haggard; he was corpulent, and of a weaselly cast of countenance. By the look of him I would have guessed his age as fifty. What was my surprise when I learnt that he was no more than thirty-six. Was it prison that had aged him so before his time? I am more disposed to think that he had been born old, like many of the world's unfortunates.

But he had money, and as a fact the divine malediction that comes upon ruined Jews had descended upon him because he was rich. In what vicissitudes had he managed to preserve some jewels, I never knew. But he had some, in several Spanish banks, on which he raised money without difficulty, and paid a lawyer. For he had a lawyer. One can imagine the fat fees extracted by a Catalan attorney from so obvious a victim. Hirschberger was accused by the Germans of having aided the publication of an anti-Nazi newspaper, which was why they had applied to the Spanish Government for the extradition of this Pan-German. On this point the Pan-German was no longer in agreement with Greater Germany. Here too was where a lawyer came in. Only in the last resort did the jewels come in, but, alas! they were always the ultimate resource.

Mr. Hirschberger had had his cell repainted at his own expense. He possessed a folding table, a set of chess-men, and a luxurious mattress. The sole lamp in his cell was adorned with a Chinese shade. He was on excellent terms with the warders, the clerks, and all the odd-job men. He never gave anything away. He merely bought, and he bought everything, remaining astonished that he could not buy the prison Governor,

or some man of no account like one of ourselves, who would have taken his place, and allowed him, the rich man, to go free.

Added to which, he talked of nothing but himself. At the exercise-hour he would button-hole one or other of us, and launch forth:

"I shall tell you about my present situation. It is fery interesting. . . ."

Then followed a long, circuitous story, which was his own story, and which he related at such length that the bugle always interrupted it before he could bring it to an end. At the next recreation-hour he tried to recapture me, but I fled, and he had perforce to start all over again with a new victim, who vanished in his turn. These Orientals know nothing of the virtue of moderation.

One day we heard he had been released. Hirschberger had indeed been summoned to the Prefecture in the presence of his lawyer. He left his nice clean cell, so recently repainted. There was a rumour of his release: but false rumours quickly get about in prisons. Hirschberger was merely scattering largesse in the cellars of the Prefecture prison. It appeared that his lawyer too came in for a bit. Then the Gestapo came for him and took him back to Germany. I have never known a more appalling thing to happen. I had seldom seen a poor unfortunate so little regretted. It must indeed be admitted that he was at once a Jew, rich, and Pan-German, and in January 1942 these were characteristics unlikely to appeal very greatly to his fellow-men.

Moreover, if we had lamented his fate in decent Christian fashion, the other Jews in the Fifth Gallery would have told us to keep quiet. There was no point in putting up a prayer on his behalf to the God who has us all in keeping. Hirschberger was a free-thinker. I rather think he was an anti-Semite as well.

I retain a melancholy memory of old M. P. of Stuttgart, a Jewish merchant, a bald, gloomy, velvet-eyed personage, and terribly sensitive. "A merchant from Stuttgart, Schiller's native town," he replied sententiously, when first interrogated. "But," he promptly added, "I hope to get to the United States soon."

It was his fixed idea, poor man. He was haunted by the obsession of getting to America, the Eldorado of the Jews of Germany: the land where Jews are not thrashed nor tortured

nor hanged; the land where they can live . . . in freedom. M. P. of Stuttgart, Schiller's native town, was bored. Sometimes he even wept, and he could never understand a joke. I said to him one day, thinking to please him, "Now is the time to write a *Life of Don Carlos*,—do as Schiller did."

But M. P. did not accept this innocent suggestion with any sort of good humour. His bald cranium flushed. It was exercise-time, and he was sitting with his beaked nose plunged in a large German book.

"Kindly go away, sir," said he. "Don't you see you are standing in my light."

It was true. There was no reply to that. M. P. always got to the barber's well ahead of anyone else, so as to get the best place, and he always had some injustice to complain of. As he stayed on and on, and became increasingly unapproachable, I gave up talking to him. On the evening of my own departure, I slipped into his cell to bid him a polite farewell. He was lying on his mattress, his great bald head prone on the pillow. For the first time I saw him without spectacles or book. I spoke a few cordial words to him, in as cheerful a tone as I could command, and shook him by the hand.

I had the impression that this was the first time he had understood my meaning. "Good luck," he answered. "Good luck."

But I very much fear that next day he sank into a deeper melancholy.

The little Lemberg Rabbi, on the other hand, was never melancholy. He was a miniature Jew with the face of an old wizened jockey, always wearing a black overcoat, and a garish pink scarf round his neck. Where had he found that ludicrous garment? From what decayed portmanteau had he unearthed it in a moment of perverted Oriental humour? Who can tell? He prayed as he turned the pages of his little Hebrew book, or muttered prayers under his breath. Sometimes he would look on in ecstasy at Erik's brutal frolics. The little rabbi had almost no body at all: his garments hung about him in such a way that beneath them and his verminous black overcoat there seemed to be no more than the adumbration of a man. Pick him up and let him drop, and nothing would be left of him but a deflated bundle of rags. A thoroughly surrealist semblance of humanity. He could speak, in addition to

Hebrew and Yiddish, Polish, Ukrainian, Hungarian, and especially German, for he had lived a great deal in Vienna. To us he talked French, Spanish, or Catalan. After leaving Vienna, he had lived in Bâle, then Paris, then Barcelona. He was always laughing, or rather grimacing, and his toothless gums opened on a cavernous purple throat. A gross type, with a savage turn of humour, and quite certainly a true believer. One fine morning he was released, and left the prison, laughing still.

CHAPTER 14

Robert and Renaud, a Comedy Couple

SOMETIMES a few fortunates strayed into the company of those whom fortune had abandoned. Robert, the Legionary of my first cell, had a French friend too, who called himself his brother. Seldom can such a blackguard have found his way into a prison. Neither of them having been in possession of identity papers when arrested, the two men described themselves as brothers. When asked their nationality they said they were Alsations, but German citizens. "Which," as Robert used to observe, "was an idiotic thing to have said." The pair of them had imagined that a Falangist State would do no harm to German citizens. Nor indeed did they suffer any harm. The Falangist State consigned them to the Carcel Modelo, to the gallery of the foreigners and of those condemned to death, but they were housed among the foreigners, with us. Robert was, let me say, an honest and decent but very violent fellow, bursting with Communistic doctrines, after ten years of garrison life in Africa and Tonkin. A Lorrainer from the Nancy country with a sense of honour, and a reverence for the Flag. In Tonkin he had married a native girl, and in France a French girl. The French wife and her baby had been killed in an air raid and Robert was wandering through life alone, trying to join the army of de Gaulle, when the Barcelona police had arrested him, six months before. "And here I am for the duration," he would say, as he paced up and down his cell, or, swathed in his blanket, contended incessantly against cold and hunger. And every

sort of evil omen gathered round him, and seemed to suggest that his prophecy would come true.

His companion, who was not his brother, exemplified almost every quality of the authentic gaoi-bird. He and the Roumanian Vassili were the only professionals of the underworld in the whole gallery: but they amply sufficed, I must admit, to perpetuate the species. Vassili was afflicted by one sole malady, the itch of theft. Utterly adrift among the honest folk of the Fifth Gallery, he went on thieving from mere habit. He had quite certainly served as a ship's mechanic, for he talked with intimate knowledge of Liverpool, Antwerp, Glasgow, Cairo, and the Cape, and he talked French. Neither stupid nor lazy, he was afflicted by an incurable mania for theft, which was why he was regarded not so much as a thief but as a stranger among people who respected other persons' goods. He stole oranges, tins of sardines, cigarettes, and since he had not been arrested for theft, he mechanically indemnified himself at the cost of his associates. Vassili's age might have been fifty. His face oozed with a kind of yellow grease, and his ragged threadbare garments recalled the tatters Maurice Chevalier used to wear when singing "Ma Pomme." One day Renaud caught him in the very act. The two men fell to blows. The officer of the guard merely consigned them to the first story, each in a separate cell, under the rubric "*Incomunicado*."

Then a dreadful thing happened, which I wish I could relate in Latin, the language in which propriety may be verbally defied. Renaud fell into a melancholy. However outcast they may be, such men do not lose the taste for human society, or for the hours of exercise on the *patio*, where there are oranges and cigarette-ends to be picked up, and interminable talk, for prisoners are inveterate talkers. A man who stops talking becomes dangerous, and soon ends up in the infirmary, or the lunatics' gallery. After bread and tobacco, man most needs speech. Renaud, by the aid of a needle and a thread dipped in excrement, performed on a certain portion of his anatomy a horrible operation which, for the sake of decency, we will describe as a hernia. It gave him frightful pain, but the device, he thought, must certainly achieve his purpose. With this to show, he would soon be in the infirmary and in bed, feeding on rice and bananas, and would complete his term as *incomunicado* in comfortable company, and—it might be—to his profit.

The officer of the guard was informed of his agonies, and was not at all impressed. As a Spaniard he was well versed in all things painful. The needle-and-thread dodge was a very old one. Renaud had met his match. His ruse was discovered.

He came out of *incomunicado* ashen-faced, as though he had slept for months under two feet of clay. And indeed his haggard visage, ravaged mouth, and cavernous voice, his filthy rags, and matted beard and skin, gave him the air of some sort of ill-favoured spectre, a visitant from beneath the earth, in fact, and rather out of countenance as he tried with sickly smiles to explain his misadventure. All his jaunty airs had gone, be sure of that. In reply to bantering questions such as: "Well, Renaud, I suppose it's comfortable in the infirmary?" he answered with a nonchalance that rang very false:

"You've said it, boy. I thought I should have passed out. I ought to be lying two feet deep looking up at the dandelion roots, I don't think. God, it was a hell of a time."

I felt sorry for him. A week later I felt more sorry for him still.

He appeared in my cell about nine in the evening, his rabbit-hole mouth all agape with smiles. "Captain, I'm off. We've been released, my brother and I. Which means that we'll be taken to Germany, seeing as how we're Germans. The Gestapo, what? Between ourselves, I'd sooner stay here. Well, good-bye everybody, good-bye. . . . If we don't meet again, we'll write, eh? Post cards, plain and coloured. . . ."

He was obviously lying. I gave him some oranges and tomatoes. "My clothes aren't up to much, ha-ha-ha! Won't the folks laugh when they see us!"

In the matter of clothes, we had only what we wore. With a profusion of courtesies Renaud turned to go, then swung round once more: "You haven't by any chance got a fag or two for the trip?"

He said it as he might have asked the time, or any sort of casual question: accepted two cigarettes with a demonstration of surprise, and departed. Warped offspring of squalor and of crime, with his aped airs of gentility and his cackling laugh, he was indeed a noisome object. I have seldom passed so gloomy an evening.

Now Renaud and Robert, like those condemned to death, were taken to the guard-house. How much they would have

given to go back to the Fifth Gallery that evening ! It was ~~unc. N. back. Lights out~~ would surely see them handcuffed. Then, in the guardroom office, they were made to sign certain lengthy documents : their hour of release had come.

They wandered aimlessly for a few moments in the dark street. Their joy was so overwhelming that they could not credit it. Quite by chance they found themselves at the Belgian Consulate, where M. Jottard came to their rescue.

A week later they were at Lisbon. Thence they departed to places far away, where the word *mañana* is never heard, and a man can at last fight the good fight—against the Germans.

CHAPTER 15

Miranda . . . Miranda

MY departure from Carcel Modelo was exactly like my arrival : it just happened, without any statement or explanation. Three months after my admission to that august edifice, my friends and I were summoned to the judges' parlour. This consisted of a room, known as the Parlour of *los Juezes*, approached through a long network of staircases and then round a turn at the far end of the corridor. There, behind a grating, an official, Clerk to some court or other, was seated at a pile of papers in a small, cramped office. He read out to me some sort of document. It was the order for my release. Why didn't I leap for joy ? Free—free at last ! Nothing of the kind. The purport of that document was simply to place me at the disposal of the Civil Governor, who was to convey us to Miranda in charge of two gendarmes. According to the regulations, prisoners were not transferred until three weeks after signature. The judge handed me a steel pen. I took it. I thought he was going to hand me the document too. Not at all. I had to slip my arm through the bars, and so sign, under the eyes of the official and the warder. The place, the surroundings, my attire, the oddity of the act of signature—the whole performance must have looked for all the world like a scene in a burlesque : especially as the notification had reached me at siesta-time, when

I was reclining on my mattress in bright blue pyjamas bought at Antibes the year before. I had thereupon wrapped myself in an old cavalry cloak: the result being that the judges' parlour suggested Grock's or the Fratellinis' dressing-room.

The rain lashed the windows. As I made my way back through the rotunda, it wore quite a different aspect. A new life had begun. There were indeed three weeks at least to run, but the whole gallery—warders, orderlies, barber, chemist—gave me a most delightful welcome. Free—I was soon to be free: and among all those poor creatures, condemned to death, to twenty or thirty years' imprisonment, their comrade whom fate had so favoured was overwhelmed by little kindnesses and courtesies. Ramirez looked less imbecile, and the poor mongoloid object St. Elias shook me vigorously by the hand. I offered cigarettes to everyone, which were accepted with the utmost courtesy and promptly cut in half for the purpose of making two fresh ones. Charming people, strange blend of distinction and of sadism, of high dignity in death and of rascality in life. But when was I to go? *Mañana?*

Those three weeks were of course more trying to the nerves than all my time there.

Every day, at exercise in the *patio*, there were visions of Miranda. Cheerful hutments, a canteen, wine, onions, and perhaps, at the close of this my exodus, the great journey to Gibraltar. No, Gibraltar was too glorious a prospect. Better not think of it as yet. Anyhow, I could look forward to Miranda, Miranda on the Ebro, where there would be no *patio*, no *limpiabotas*, no cells . . . and none condemned to death.

One evening, on a Wednesday after curfew, the warder came for me. The bolt creaked back for the last time. The farewells were touching. In many of the cells the prisoners got up from their mattresses, some in their ragged garments, some in their pyjamas. Luner had on a handsome pink-velvet dressing-gown, which always struck me as amusingly incongruous in a place where the bed was the floor. Evariste Bardin, the anarchist statistician, dashed up with coat-tails flying. Giovanni the Italian wept. Panama made me a thousand compliments in English and in Spanish. Borrowed books were returned; addresses exchanged. Erik was there, of course. Erik the Thuringian Jew, scenting business, for prisoners released always needed provisions for their journey: cigarettes,

bread, etc. I had, however, taken the precaution of providing myself with all I wanted from the Indian *limpiabotas*, who beamed as he slapped me on the back, and fluttered back and forward like a bat. The whole scene lasted twenty minutes, under the eye of the officer of the guard, who viewed these demonstrations with benevolence.

"Come," I said to myself. "This is the beginning of the end." I was sent to spend three days in solitude in the *Transitos* cell.

Every morning the warder came to wake us, with a shout of: "*Levantarse*" ("Get up"). Each man leapt into his clothes, and stood and waited. A quarter of an hour passed . . . an hour. . . . Then nothing. False alarm. The coffee arrived punctually. Then the *vigilante*, who rapped out: "*Enfermos*." It was a morning formality for the benefit of those who were at last to attain Miranda.

The dawn brightened, the light went out, and closed down for half an hour a recently started game of bridge, which, of course, the Poles were on the point of winning. The clock made another complete round of twenty-four hours without complaint from anyone. We waited, calmly and quietly, the next *mañana*.

On the morning of the fourth day, not having seen the light of heaven again, I heard the bolt shot back. The rotunda clerk, a spruce young gentleman, came in and said briskly:

"*Haga Usted el favor de levantarse?*" ("Will your Grace do me the favour to get up?").

And I answered "*Muchas gracias*" ("Many thanks").

I leapt into my clothes. My bag was ready. There were a few formalities to be gone through in the rotunda. Seven o'clock was about to strike. Beneath that great glazed vault I could measure all the immensity of those four months of boredom. For the first time I saw the sweepers at work, those sweepers of the dawn so often heard; then the coffee trolleys, all that invisible rotation of events that controlled every instant of our day. At this moment I was recapitulating my life, but from the other end. At seven o'clock the bugle sounded. I could see it at the bugler's lips. The notes leapt up and pierced the vast encirclement of galleries. On this my last day I was beside the bugler, not among the sleeping. The gendarmes were awaiting me at the gate, with the usual handcuffs. The

touch of them gave me a sensation of relief. For one can never tell. The Spanish authorities have such queer turns of humour. It had happened that a released prisoner had been sent to the right-about because the guard-room had not been properly notified of his discharge. My wrists thrilled at the cool contact of the bracelets. I was saved. The file of prisoners began to move. Among them there was a young stateless Jew, from Cracow, who had set up as a fair-ground photographer at Barcelona. His father, a carpet merchant, stateless himself, who smelt of rancid oil and bore an uncanny resemblance to Albert Sarraut, had been allowed to say good-bye to him at the barred gate of the rotunda. The young man wore a jaunty air : the old one was sobbing. Great tears rolled down his cheeks behind his spectacles. Then, as the gates creaked back, he vanished. It was my last vision of prison.

I wondered what would be my first impression on emerging into the world, what would be the first word I should catch sight of on a house-front or above a shop-window. It was, in fact, the legend—*Carniceria* (Butcher). But I had hardly time to look about me. A lorry was awaiting us, an enormous vehicle with open benches. It already contained five women, manacled like ourselves. I was put to sit beside a very pretty and talkative young woman from Madrid, whose hair, cut *à la* Marie Antoinette, seemed to invite the guillotine. I was in good form, and so was she. I remember saying to her : " You are being taken to your death. Tell me your sins and I will give you absolution. But you must tell them all. You will find me an indulgent confessor. . . . "

She burst out laughing : and it was not until an instant later that I had the sense of a lapse of taste, of having made a joke that sounded very sinister on emerging from that abode of the dead . . . and of the dying. The coach stopped outside the gendarmerie barracks to fill up with petrol. Once the engine had been switched off, the worthy gendarmes could not manage to re-start it. A young Fleming from Alost, with the handcuffs on his wrists, plumped down on the clutch and got it going. We were decidedly accommodating prisoners. The world looked so inviting. The gendarmes were wearing their handsome black cocked-hats with black chin-straps. When they took off their hats, the chin-strap remained in place, like a black elastic, reaching from the point of the chin round the top of the

head. Everything amused us and delighted us. We had recovered our childhood. And it was a fine day.

First stage to Saragossa. Second stage to Irun. Long journeys in the train. The lands of Catalonia, Aragon, and Navarre passed us by. Saragossa prison, where the inmates lay hideously huddled side by side all night long in the common hall. Never have I seen an array of prostrate human beings look so exactly like partridges and hares laid out after a shoot. And everywhere in every prison, the same routine, the same songs, the same green soup, the same bean-coffee. And as they brushed past us, the prisoners muttered: "*Vivat Churchill*." In the trains the gendarmes talked to us very affably, and were obviously interested in our adventures. If the handcuffs galled us a little, they were promptly eased. In the street we wore them on our wrists; in the train, on our ankles. After four days, a white town appeared: Miranda, the last stage before Gibraltar.

In the train, the gendarmerie sergeant has asked me how old I was.

"Forty? You are not married?"

"Indeed I am."

"Any children?"

"Yes."

"Where are they?"

"Very far away. I hope to see them again some time."

He sighed, eyed me with an air of benign and kindly sympathy, and gloomily shook his head.

Saragossa was certainly the most unpleasant stage upon our journey, since for our three-days sojourn there we were subjected to all the ritual of a fresh incarceration: disinfected, searched, shaven, etc. . . . And, worst of all, on the march through the town, handcuffed, tragic memories came back into my mind. It was at Saragossa that in the spring of 1939 I had fallen in with a Belgian friend, Rodolphe, an airman with eleven victories to his record in Franco's army. In September 1936 it was to me he came and said: "Tell me how I can enrol myself in the service of Spain. . . . I want to fight." And, like a paladin, he had gone forth. Less than three years later he was famous throughout the Spanish army. In July 1940 he was flying the skies of England, and he fought for four days in the Battle of Britain. His first three combats ended in three

Messerschmitts brought down: in the fourth he himself fell. He survived, and flew once more in 1941, when he was finally brought down in the greatest of all causes. His death made me think of the grand words of the Psalmist: "I was overthrown and I fell . . . the Lord received me in his arms." As I passed the town hall of Saragossa in 1942, with my bag on my shoulder, my skull shaven, manacled to my neighbour, I recognized on my left a café where I had dined with Rodolphe. I recalled his high heroic tales, his wild infectious laughter, yonder in the corner near the bar. And I went on, proud as a beggar, eyeing the escort with disdain, my heart warmed by the recollection of a hero.

CHAPTER 16

Purgatory after Hell

AT Miranda on the Ebro, the conquering Spaniards of 1939 had established a vast camp for foreigners. In principle it was intended solely for the miscellaneous undesirables who haunted the roads of Spain: not for the members of the International Brigades. On these, prompt justice had been done. The Italians who fell into the hands of the Blackshirts had been shot: the Germans likewise. All the survivors, duly despoiled by the Moorish rabble, had been drafted into the notorious Palencia labour battalion, and thence, much later, to Miranda on the Ebro, between Bilbao and Burgos.

Miranda de Ebro enjoyed much more fame in the annals of the second world war than Carcel Modelo: indeed Miranda was the great marshalling yard of Europe. Since May 1940, the Jews and all the proscripts who had managed to escape from France made their melancholy appearance there. All those who had no passports trailed into Miranda, flanked by gendarmes in cocked-hats, whom they plied with cigarettes and chocolate. They came there from the prison of Gerona, from the prison of Figueras, from Jaca, or merely from San Sebastian. Instead of a bolted door, it was a barred gate that enclosed them: instead of a whitewashed ceiling, there was the sky: the inter-

minable prison wall was succeeded by a barbed-wire fence. What first met their eyes was the rolling plain rich with crops, then the mountains of Castille, sometimes black as ink, sometimes crystal green, according as the ever-shifting clouds shed or carried off with them their loads of colour. The camp was oddly like an upturned box of toys. White buildings with red roofs set out in neat array, rows of young chestnut and mulberry trees, chapel, infirmary, commandant's office, guard-house, all admirably arranged and disposed between the river and the railway. A mile or so away lay Miranda, with its streets and belfries. That was the real town: ours was the artificial one, created by an ingenious engineer.

All these professional vagrants were soon joined by their more occasional brethren: British, Belgian, Dutch, and especially Poles. Twenty-five numbered huts were shared among forty-two nations. As a sort of railway junction for the Atlantic, Miranda contained every kind of human element which was not claimed by some specific government. Very few Americans from the North, and when they did appear they were better avoided. The fact that the Almighty Republic of the Stars and Stripes had not recognized its denizens, suggested that they were extremely undesirable. There were many Southern Americans, or persons nominally such: though, between ourselves, there must have been some cogent reason for the failure of Argentine or Uruguay to claim their citizens. The fact was that, in general, these prisoners were Spanish Reds, who, having no papers on them when arrested, had declared themselves nationals of some South American State in order to escape the gallows. The Argentine, then fascistically inclined, took no steps to get them back. There were no Mexicans nor Russian Reds. These Marxist governments had rescued their people back in 1939, and since then had risked no more of them. Of the old Brigade, there remained the natives of countries with Fascist tendencies, such as Hungarians, Roumanians, the Ukrainians, certain Yugoslav and Dutch communists, and of course the Czechs and Poles: martyrs indeed, but sometimes heroes, and sometimes the merest rank and file.

The Belgians had come in rather slowly, but they had made up for that in 1942. I have known them 920 strong, when the Poles totalled 450. They had no liking for geography, nor for aliens, had those Belgians. They were instructed in the map of

Europe at Miranda. I knew some bright lads, fresh from a little seminary at Brabant, who in a couple of months could make themselves understood in Polish. And the White Russians with Nansen passports, the Greek tinkers, the Gipsy tinmen, the Bosnian bearleaders, the Palestinian Jews, the Ukrainian Jews, the Viennese Jews, the evil-smelling Jews from Bessarabia, the Askenazi Jews who talk Yiddish, the Sephardim Jews who talk Spanish, the Jewish doctors, the Jewish journalists, the great Jewish draper from Mulhouse, the Jewish announcer from Radio City, the Jewish Under-Secretary of State, Deputy and millionaire, the little Jew of Prague, the Moroccan Jew, all the ghettos, all the tribes, and all the smells, pursuing their interminable way over the mighty world, dragging with them across the centuries their burden of malediction; loathed by the Poles, loathed by the Belgians, despised by the Russians, always recognized for what they are, and always persecuted, even and especially by the foolish of this world. Lastly, the Catholic Jews, the most tiresome of all and the most intolerant, baptized Jews, made to pay dearly by the Christians for a brotherhood too recently achieved. Below the Jew, there were the negroes from Cuba and the Cape, trimmers and greasers rounded up without papers at Cadiz or Corunna; an odd Chinaman or Annamite: and the syphilitics. Finally, the Spanish soldiers.

For here the masterly tactics of the Falangists continued in operation. In his zeal to lay bare to us all the sores, all the abscesses, all the tumours and gangrenes in the crucified body of unhappy Spain, M. Serrano Suner made a point of acquainting us with all he had to show: slaughter, imprisonment, and the squalor of the labour battalion.

For some mysterious reason, into this Tower of Babel that was Miranda the Spanish authorities had introduced five hundred miserable little rickety urchins picked out of the street gutters, too young to have taken part in the 1936-1939 war, and yet classed as *Rojos*. Many of them, at the age of twenty in 1942, spent six years in penal battalions. Under-nourished, sallow, stunted little imps, in much worse case than the prisoners of Carcel Modelo, they did some of the heavy work, and were then free to beg. When they had swallowed their bit of bread, their spoonful or two of soup, they—convicts of Spain—could then devote themselves to the service of the foreign prisoners. At regular intervals the camp authorities would announce that it

was prejudicial to Spanish honour and the reputation of the Spanish army for a soldier of Spain to act as valet to a foreign master. But the convict paid no attention. Little cared he for *Hispanidad*. He was hungry. The cabbage soup was green water, with a few beans or haricots floating in it. Many of the foreigners ate but half of it or never touched it at all. The emaciated Spaniards dogged the well-nourished Britishers with beseeching eyes. Sometimes a Britisher or Canadian, in an impulse of pity, would give a man his pannikin and a morsel of biscuit. In order to assure himself of this regular addition to his ration, the soldier of Spain would undertake any sort of job, of the most trivial and even menial kind. I have known Spanish orderlies as prompt, discreet, willing, and obsequious as any Chinese boy. We treated them like boys, paid them like boys, and rewarded them with tips or kicks. Every day they became more insistent with their plaintive appeals: "*Sobra sopa*" ("Soup leavings.") In all this cosmopolitan quarter that was ours, the Jew was of course the parasite, and the Spaniard the native. Sallow and emaciated, in his wretched garb of evil-smelling frieze, coughing and spitting, he irresistibly recalled the tag-rag of Shanghai or Hong-Kong, offering their rickshas, obscenely scratching and picking at their vermin. They would herd round the hutment doors, and though kicked away they came back incessantly. Sometimes one of their N.C.O.s went after them, and they scuttled off like rabbits, only to return at the hour of soup, murmuring: "*Sobra sopa*."

We were forbidden to throw scraps out of the windows. None the less, this was the normal method of disposing of refuse, and the Spaniards, like the dogs of Constantinople, assured the effective working of that service. All my life shall I see those suppliant faces waiting beneath my window. One of the most assiduous smiled at every movement that I made. When I turned my back his face fell. Scarcely had I looked round at him again when he began to smile. I once was guilty of an error. I flung a rotten orange out of the window. The man rushed at it: so did half a dozen others, and there followed a savage scuffle in the mud over a rotten orange.

For them, as for everyone else, one occupation remained, and that was trade. I have spoken of the bread and tobacco exchange at Carcel Modelo. At Miranda, the notice "Economic and Financial Agency" might have been put up at every door.

Whence came the money? British, Poles, Belgians, Dutch, all the Allies in fact, received four *pesetas* a day from their respective governments, as well as parcels. The Belgian group alone spent ten thousand *pesetas* in this way every week. The Consulates and Embassies combined distributed about thirty thousand. Add twenty thousand *pesetas* from various sources. Fifty thousand *pesetas*, or six hundred and fifty thousand French francs, were thus paid out every Wednesday in our village. Here indeed was a prospect of business, with so much money changing hands. Until the autumn of 1941, the camp was thrown open for a few hours every day, and the prisoners dashed into Miranda town, which did very well out of us. The cafés made a fortune. The *novias* all had *novios* among our ranks. Not a dark-haired girl that had not a handsome fair-haired admirer. The lady in the station tobacco shop was the most popular of all. A few prisoners of course disappeared for good, and one fine evening the camp gates were shut. No more diversions in the town. I only knew that glorious time as a matter of history, and of legend also, from the stories of the old inhabitants, Ukrainians, Dutch, Serbians, or merely stateless prisoners, who had known Miranda in the days of old, when Carmen and Dolores welcomed Hans and Johnny, against a background of boleros and mantillas. That severance was the cause of many broken hearts. In 1942 all Miranda was still lamenting her lost loves, and the camp knew no more of Spain than the beggars in uniform, the lousy little urchins who whined "*Sobra sopa.*" Another of their catchwords was *se vende* (for sale).

In Miranda camp everything was on sale. Set a price on it and it was sold. The prisoners passing through spent their money, the others pocketed it. Dealers from Nuremberg or Budapest kept forty thousand *pesetas* in the till. They bought clothes. In August a good pullover fetched five francs: in December a hundred *pesetas*. The famished prisoner arriving from a distant prison sold all his garments to buy bread and wine. When he departed, provided with a new outfit from his Consulate, he left a wealthy Jew behind him. The finest Jamaica cigars were smoked in camp, and the finest Chartreuse was drunk. Berkovitch the Bessarabian, and Ricardo from the Canaries, kept bars. Berkovitch's place was crowded in the mornings, after the gymnastic lessons, for chocolate, and in the

evenings for coffee. Berkovitch never bought a pound of coffee or chocolate in town. But shortly before my departure I saw him buy a thousand *pesetas*' worth of coffee at one deal. The Polish and Belgian Consulates, to mention them alone, could have easily extracted from Berkovitch a heavy tax on his war profits. It was a public bar. Some Greeks long established at Odessa, who constructed tea-urns out of milk tins, had set up a samovar. There were biscuits, preserves, cakes, sugar . . . a veritable Wiener Kafé. Berkovitch was much in evidence, with his egg-shaped shaven cranium. He entered up accounts on his slate with the greatest affability; for of course a great deal of business was done on credit. The customers talked politics. Berkovitch was a doughty defender of the liberty of conscience. A man of principle, a friend of humanity, who quoted Jean-Jacques, and did not persecute his debtors.

Ricardo, from the Canaries, kept a speak-easy. His cellar was about the size of a small railway compartment. A bed, a narrow passage, a minute cupboard, and a night-table. He had emigrated from his distant Poland in days long past, set up a junk-shop at Santa Cruz de Teneriffe, where he had sold wine. A Polish Jew, an astute man, with a mop of hair, he had established his wife and children at Miranda, whence they came to visit him at the gates every day at six o'clock. Greetings and farewells were lengthy and affectionate. Madame Ricardo brought her husband a fine basket of vegetables and fresh eggs, his daily lunch. By the evening he had made a hundred *pesetas* on it. In this speak-easy there was not a bottle to be seen. There didn't appear to be a glassful of anything to offer. Then Ricardo would dexterously lift a corner of his flooring with an iron bar. There, between the planking and the beaten earth, lay ten thousand francs' worth of Pedro Domecq brandy, Mono anisette, Chartreuse from Tarragona, and Negrita rum. Madame Ricardo's tomatoes and new-laid eggs had turned into wines and spirits, and the money rolled in. Christmas Eve represented a clear profit of eight hundred *pesetas* in the Ricardo till. I never drank anything at Ricardo's place but liqueurs of the finest quality, seated on the prisoner's bed, a prisoner like himself, but served with the utmost ceremony. He provided me with a cigarette, a match, gave me credit, and talked of Poland and the manners and customs of the Canary Islands. Ricardo's elegant bar, in all its glowing intimacy, was redolent of

the underworld, and evoked visions of the drug-trafficker, a soft, vivacious figure silhouetted beneath a flickering street-lamp, smiling, with a finger on his lips. Well—it provided an odd atmosphere of deliverance.

CHAPTER 17

A Dull Sunday

It is seven o'clock : and it is Sunday. A confused, melodious murmur enters through the hutment door. The sound of a trombone. A falling cadence of ten notes, then a full-throated blare from trumpets, cornets, and saxophones. The prisoners' band, on days of festival, goes the round of the camp sounding the reveille. The musicians, who know their piece by heart, play each man for himself. The trombone turns his back on the conductor. The cornet surveys the landscape, and the trumpet inspects the roofs. None the less the concert proceeds automatically, and circumnavigates the camp at least three or four times ; for everyone must be given a chance to hear it. One might imagine oneself at Spa, or some such watering-place in the good old days, when the municipal choir marched forth to serenade the bathers. Slipping coats over their pyjamas, the prisoners hurry out to get their coffee ration. Others light their little stoves. These stoves are forbidden, but they are everywhere to be seen. Not a man but has improvised a flue from a piece of piping, which looks like an anti-tank gun trained on the opposite roof. Interior partitions are also forbidden, and are universal. Indeed the prisoners commonly lived in cells accommodating two or three, and shared expenses.

Half an hour passed. The band sounds the roll-call. The *cabo*, or corporal, in charge of each hutment, shouts " Company —Form ! " in a pleasant Polish accent. The hutment is divided into two stories, the upper story being reached by a staircase of three perpendicular steps, and the constant scrambles up and down are not unaccompanied by accidents. The morning noises rise upon the air like the clatter of an awakening aviary. Everyone seems to be called Matalpski, Zutjedwaf, Van de

Muelebroek, or Van de Kerchove : Warsaw and Brussels had met together. Vistula, Niemen, Meuse, and Scheldt had merged their waters. Belgium and Poland came forth pell-mell in column, while other swaying columns, floundering through the viscous mud, make their several ways to a football field entitled the "Square of the Generalissimo Franco." The band plays a quick-step, with recurrent fanfares from the trumpets. Sandals can be heard clop-clop-clopping through the mud. Opposite the platform, the great white platform where the mast awaits its flag, two thousand prisoners are arrayed, together with a thousand Spaniards from the penal battalions. A pause. An officer mounts the platform, gloved and belted. The assemblage knows him by sight. Always on the run, and doing everything at the double, he is commonly called "The Speed King." Another, an elderly lieutenant, weary and very shaky in the legs, is known as the "Dodderer." Then there is the Royalist officer personified, a magnificent youth, slim, buttoned up to the chin, with a triangular torso, and a clipped moustache like a large fly underneath his nose. The bugle sounds three notes. The officer begins his litany :

"Saluto a la bandera : uno."

The trumpets volley forth a shattering blast. The red-and-gold flag glides smoothly up the halyards. The officer, immaculate, salutes. Two thousand prisoners salute, none of them immaculate. All are muttering curses. The outstretched hands favour every sort of anti-Fascist salutation, beginning with the two fingers parted in a V. The oriflamme, the bandera, floats at the top of the mast.

"Dos."

All hands fall, angry and disgusted, and slip into pockets, seeking crumbs of tobacco and a scrap of rice-paper. We may smoke at last. The N.C.O.s pass quickly along the lines. The Polish *cabo* trots along with a list in his hand, looking intensely preoccupied.

"Line up, gentlemen, please ; it's for your own good."

The N.C.O. prowls past, numbering off the files. What a long and wearisome performance it all seems ! Two thousand swaying heads in motion, four thousand shuffling feet amid a spate of imprecations. Thus Franco every day endures a quarter-hour of torment. He is sliced into small pieces. He is flung into the latrines. Neither Octave Mirbeau nor the sadists

of Byzantium ever invented a garden of torments comparable to the fate reserved for Franco. It would have appalled the coprophagists themselves.

At last came the shout: "*Rompar filas.*"

The lines broke up, and the crowd made their way back to the huts. Dogs scuttled among the bandsmen, who rushed wildly after them, still puffing their flutes and saxophones. At that moment a covey of Spanish soldiers tried to force their way through a Belgian column. They were seized and held and pummelled, and flung into the mud like hods of dirty linen. Whereupon, mud-bespattered, they incontinently fled. When they reached the huts the prisoners re-lit their cigarettes. At the very doorways stood the same Spanish soldiers, begging:

"*Se vende chusco?*" ("Who'll buy my bread, please?")

It was Franco's bread that they were ready to sell. They had forgotten their drubbing. They wanted a couple of *pesetas*.

At half-past ten Mass assembled all the foreigners who so desired, and all the Spaniards who did not. French, Belgians, and Poles were present as being believers. As to the Spaniards, it was hard to tell. They appear file by file, coming up at the double, dressed in their best clothes, white gloves and polished boots, form up in line opposite the minute little summer-house of a chapel, where the priest is already approaching the altar. The weather has changed to fine again and a clear sun is slowly drying the sodden earth. The little soldiers of Spain doff their police caps in unison and expose a row of shaven crowns like black marbles. They do not blaspheme, as did the inmates of the Carcel Modelo. Still less do their pray. They merely wait for the end, and an opportunity to scratch. After the reading of the Gospel, in the golden sunshine, a N.C.O., a member of the Third Order, in khaki uniform, gets up into a pulpit and declaims an impassioned harangue to the glory of Catholic Spain.

"*Dignísimos oficiales, sub-oficiales y soldados del Ejército español. . .*"

He annoys everybody, even the celebrant, a Belgian Jesuit prisoner. A train passes just outside the barbed-wire fence. A locomotive is manœuvring near by, wheezing in the effort to suppress its escaping steam. Ancient memories begin to steal into my mind, memories of the village procession on August 15th. The altar in a rustic chapel in the open fields. The boys'

choir: the roadside tram halting for the procession to pass, while the passengers cross themselves, and the driver stands by, cap in hand. A final blare of the bugle at the prayers of dismissal, and the crowd of foreigners disperses.

Then another fanfare, and the troop of white-gloved Spaniards returns to its huts. That hour is, for me, the heaviest hour of all the day. I had heard that march-tune played so often in times gone by, between 1936 and 1939, in Spain's heroic years. It was the march of the Volunteers, with an accompaniment of hunting horns. Many a bold foray had gone forth to that music. It had welcomed home many victorious warriors and cheered many forth to battle. The men of the Navarrese Division sped like winged creatures into the firing line to the rhythm of that tune. To-day, for us passing foreigners, Franco could offer no better spectacle than these cowardly little convicts of the penal battalions, who muttered curses as they marched by. When the horns took up the refrain, it was the voice of Navarre that sang, the voice of High Castile uplifted and defying death. On the right and left of the platform were inscribed the texts: "If you love your mother, love your Country" and "A sacrifice for your Country is a sacrifice easy to bear."

The soldiers of Spain dispersed. It was near midday. The orderlies made their way to the kitchens. Soon they could be seen coming back, carrying great tureens filled with a greenish, brownish liquid. One of them would lose his footing, and the liquid tipped out of the tureen on to the damp ground. This brought a hurrying throng from all directions. The soldiers of Spain were hungry. They flung themselves onto the viscid mass of earth and cabbage-juice. And when they rose to their feet, not a drop was left.

An hour later they were wandering up and down the foreigners' corridors, crying: "*Sobra sopa.*"

Four o'clock. On the Place del Generalissimo the Poles are playing football against the United Allies, and winning. The principal promenade, along the south side of the wire fence, is black with people. It is specially favoured by the English, and much frequented at every hour of the day. Outside the doors of the official camp wine-merchant's booth, who will open very soon, a queue has begun to form, and the Spanish barmen, in the traditionary blue cattle-merchants' smocks, are preparing the casks. They will soon be the centre of a mob struggling to fill

their bottles. There has been a good deal of drinking in the camp already. The three niggers are drunk, and are engaged in a rough-and-tumble with some Argentines and Roumanians. The shadows on the mountain darken into violet, and the splendid sun sinks to rest like a hidalgo swathed in the great cloak of the Golden Fleece. Far away on the road can be seen the Sunday couples strolling homewards. Those roads look very far away. About six o'clock, files of prisoners begin to form up, and stand, each with his pannikin between his feet, awaiting the arrival of the soup. A gigantic eagle passes, with a wing span of at least two yards, returns, and hovers slowly, lazily, overhead, without a quiver of his great wings. All the airmen, and there are airmen of all the Allied armies in the camp, stand nose in air, arguing about angles and atmospheric pressure : pilots of Air-France and Belgique-Congo, with the English pilots brought down at Saint Nazaire, now on their way back home.

Comes the soup, the final bugle-call, and a final kick for the Spanish soldiery. Night has fallen. One by one the lamps on the ring-fence flash out, flooding the barbed wire with their garish light. The sentries, at intervals of fifty yards, begin once again their lugubrious litany : "*Alerta . . . alerta.*" In the doorways a few last groups are still immersed in argument. Snatches of music burst forth from the huts. The niggers, now completely drunk, are asleep, overcome by the noxious alcohol they have consumed. Coffee with Berkovitch, curaçao with Ricardo. Candles throw dancing gleams into the pools of shadow. Our tedious Sunday is at an end. The Spanish sun is extinguished. It is ten o'clock : the village is asleep ; and Montparnasse will now begin to dance.

At Miranda I used often to go to a Belgian club called the Penguins, a convivial society without any defined objects, founded by airmen who had fought heroically, and now drank, with equal heroism, red Rioja wine out of tin cups. Seeking oblivion of their cares, they found it in evenings spent over the bottle, and in the study of the great problems of the day. There I delivered lectures on the destiny of Europe, on the future of the Press, on the history of France, to pilots whose eyes were filled with dreams, parachutists whose best story was worthy of a poem by Valéry, graduates of the Staff College, barristers, and all manner of pleasant fellows, who had found their way into that

Society for no particular reason except that, like cocks in a farmyard, they managed to dominate their fellows by mere vociferousness and flapping of their wings. When the discussion was over, the entire company had to join in the Penguins' songs. Twenty-four Penguins—their number was limited—by the light of sacristy candles, tapers pink and blue, swayed arm in arm from right to left, singing frantically as they drained their bottles of rough red wine, so huddled together that their knees collided sideways and in front. The fly-tox lamps lit up their faces with the baleful glare of Judgement Day. When cigarettes were running out, the Penguins passed from mouth to mouth the last Gold Flake, the last Woodbine. It was a fine fraternity, a vertical unit of society, combining both ends of the social scale, exclusive, much criticized, and even hated, but there was not one airman who did not long to join. At every vacancy there were twenty candidates only too anxious to fill it, from a professor at the Staff College to a Flemish publican. The elections were a frantic affair, and involved many enmities and much intrigue. The whole Belgian colony was in a turmoil. Which made matters all the more serious on the day when the rival Society of White-bottoms came into existence.

The Penguins drank, and meditated on life. The White-bottoms merely drank. Their founders were the pilots of the great Belgian Congo air-line, men accustomed to vast spaces, conquerors of the air and of the Sahara, conquerors of the equatorial forests, who talked of Fort Archambaud, Chad, and High Katanga, as Diocletian talked of his kitchen garden. Now, imprisoned at Miranda, they drank and ate out of the same bowl. Thus the heroes of the Aeneid, when their exploits were over, enjoyed their ambrosia and told the stories of their combats. They had made love to every sort of woman, roasted under every sort of sun, and eaten every sort of food, Negro, Cleuh, Berber, Sudanese. At Miranda they were content with their soup and the wine they drank. The White-bottoms never left their club. They spent their day there. The original complement had been extended to include some sailors, hospital orderlies, and mechanics, a motley crowd who were often men of little moment, but they acquired importance in becoming White-bottoms. A man became a White-bottom just as he became a Penguin, and election was not easy. For a trifle, an ill-timed word, a touch of swagger, a candidate might easily be rejected by the Penguins ;

which was a social disaster. Worst of all, some were rejected for no stated reason; and thenceforward spent their time suspecting somebody or other. If their sojourn at Miranda was prolonged, they attributed that fact to their failure to be elected to the Penguins.

The Ardennais modelled themselves on the officers, N.C.O.s and men of the regiments of Chasseurs Ardennais in the Belgian army. They drank standing, and their rallying call was "the boar's grunt at dawn." Then, like the Penguins, they discoursed. Among all these idle men, labouring under the dread affliction of boredom, the passion for talk was as violent as among parliamentarians in the great days of democracy. Cases were known of human beings who had died of boredom. They had, in fact, lost the taste for conversation. I have myself known, at Carcel Modelo, one or two who were confined *incomunicado*, and thus reduced to silence, die by slow stages or go mad. A man must talk, even without the aid of wine. All the more so if, while listening to others' speech, he can drink the rough and generous Rioja wine. The Ardennais argued. The Penguins and the White-bottoms talked. The sum of their discourse would not have amounted to more than that of my children when they were still girls and boys. Momentous trifles, gossip, vapid recollections, detailed narratives of what happened yesterday or very long ago. That is the way of simple folk: and rightly so. What should we have thought of our children if, at ten years old, they no longer itched to tell interminable stories? Belgians are neither dreamers nor fatalists. They are men of sense and action, ruddy-complexioned, and quite unacquainted with neurasthenia. They sing, and they talk: and in order to conjure melancholy away, they dub themselves Penguins and White-bottoms. They thump on the tin crates before them as they drain their tin pannikins of rough red juice. Few races can drain a cask so briskly. Just as the Dutchmen drained the Zuyder Zee, talking—all the while. . . .

Let us go forth and go the round of the Mirandan Montparnasse. In hut No. 1, Rudi the librarian, a little Saxon with the air of a Franciscan monk, is rolling cigarettes near a little lamp between two shelves of books, while engaged in composing a commentary on Pio Barroja's *Conspirator's Apprenticeship*, our universal bedside book. There, too, is Miguel Pons, an Asturian anarchist, who saved his skin by passing as an Argentine. A

baroque type, cynical and intelligent, with a monkish profile which he accentuates by an extensive tonsure, as worn by a barefoot Carmelite. There, too, is Litvinoun, a Sephardic Jew from Serajevo, a Serbian by nationality, an agricultural engineer in Jugoslavia, ex-captain in an International Brigade. Also Lister, a doctor from the Ukraine, and Liliker, another doctor from the Ukraine, both of them formerly students at Paris University, members of the International Brigade, Franco's prisoners, Communists both, highly respectable young men though quite fantastic, Polish citizens, but Jews, and as such kept at arm's-length by the Poles. Lister, moreover, is a champion bridge-player. He talks French and Spanish correctly but with difficulty, though he writes them with ease. His Memoirs are a strange rambling narrative, in excellent eighteenth-century style. He writes them slowly, but without a single erasure, in a delicate, attractive, and oddly distinguished script. He could write indefinitely, like a river flowing on and on. One thing only weighs upon his mind, and that is that he cannot for long maintain the tenor of his thought. No sooner launched into an argument than he is hopelessly astray, and then vainly tries to find himself, like a dog snapping at his own tail. A Jew with a strong Slav strain. Liliker is more a man of mind, a gentler but a stronger character, with dream-filled eyes, a broad dark face and black hair: and his conversation is full of a grave charm, never descending to trivialities. I admit frankly that during those months of distress and homesickness this Jew was a true friend to me. Together with Litvinoun and Rudi the Saxon, I found in his company a clear and honest revolutionary atmosphere, free from all spirit of intrigue, in which upright, decent men could foregather. To all this Liliker added the virtue of modesty, and a profound consciousness of the fatality that burdened his own race: disaster. When we spoke of France, he used to say: "France—I owe everything to France, and first of all my appreciation of lucidity. We Orientals so soon lose ourselves in the divagations of our minds. We involve ourselves. The French have the gift of setting forth their thoughts in proper sequence. . . ." Lister very heartily agreed, and plunged once more into some argument which he could never bring to a conclusion. Rudi, the little Saxon, with his twisted mouth, his mop of curly hair, his large feet and his short legs, smiled a genial smile. He had seen all these intellectuals

cross the Pyrenees to fight in Spain, to wield a weapon in the great Red Crusade. He had seen these Orientals, their heads full of statistics and their eyes aglow with dreams, come to a halt at Puycerda, at Perpignan, or simply in Paris, at the headquarters of the International Red Relief Organization. Many came on foot, literally on foot, begging their bread along the roads. From Lwow or Czernovitz to the Rue Mathurin Moreau. That is why they bear so deep a grudge against Léon Blum, whom they conceive of as a traitor, public enemy No. 1, Blum who never embodied words in deeds, who would not launch his crusaders on the pilgrimage of sacrifice and honour. When Liliker had concluded some such tirade, Dr. Lister would shake his head, and look downwards with an expression of dismay. If these intellectuals, these idealists, admirers of Barbusse and of Romain Rolland, had been able to settle accounts with that other Israelitish intellectual, who never inhabited a garret in the Rue des Rosiers, but owned an agreeable flat on the Quai Bourbon, they would have done so to some purpose. And they would have found him, like themselves, stricken by divine fatality, immured in a fort, in the depths of the Pyrenees, at Portalet. At that time Blum had long since been removed from his social fireside to a cell in a casemate, and reduced to silence. Oh, Jehovah, what must have been the transgressions of Thy people that Thou hast thus visited Thy wrath upon them since Thou didst first consign them to the concentration camp of Babylon!

In hut No. 1 lived a nondescript rabble of Hungarians, Serbs, Ruthenians, Germans, with a majority of Poles and Dutchmen. These men had endured all that a mortal may endure: the prison of San Pedro de Cardenas at Burgos, where the prisoners were called on to pay the cost of their own coffins; and Palencia, where they were housed in a church, with open tombs for use as latrines. They had been subjected to the bastinado, and forced labour. For fifty months they had been prisoners, and for the last twelve months they were actually living at Miranda. For them Miranda was heaven, rest at last, a heaven between Rudi's library and Pons' guitar. Lister is just finishing a reading of the *Journal d'un Curé de Campagne*, by Bernanos, when Dr. Carlos comes in.

Dr. Carlos is a fair-headed gentleman of rather dashing appearance, without a penny in his pocket, though, as medical orderly in the camp, he has amassed a small fortune there by

selling pills to the soldiers which made them ill enough to exempt them from service. That is why he is called Doctor. He is a jazz pianist who has performed at Vienna and Paris. Profession dubious, nationality uncertain: character equally so. One sole quality he did possess: a gift for music. In his company I could fancy myself in the Rue Vavin in Paris, at the Vikings, or the Poisson d'Or. He could extract from an accordion all manner of sighing and sobbing, all the delightful dazzlement of passion, and all its gloom. As a pianist he must have been a wonderful performer. The money acquired by the sale of pills had disappeared, on wine no doubt. There remained his talent. For a few *pesetas* he would evoke the very spirit of the Dance. Don't talk to him: he is no more than a canary. Just listen to his music. And then, from one bunk and another, emerge the very genii of song. They dance in the candle-light, in all manner of strange guises: strange surrealist boots, veritable boots by Poulbot, tin cans with their little spoon sisters, all the stock-in-trade of the Macedonian carpenter, ancient garments, the Ruthenian barber's chair and tools, begin to shake and quiver to the rhythm of that music. The genii enter singing, bestriding broomsticks, fluttering the pages of the books, swaying the hammocks, whirling the incredible overcoats and camp-towels off their hooks and rails. The Hungarians are transported to the Pusta, Rudi to his Erzgebirge, haunt of elves and leprechauns. Certain harmonies awaken visions of women washing clothes in Cornish streams, of the enchanter Merlin in the forest of Brocielande. The Oriental teller of tales transports us on a magnificent carpet to the land of the Thousand and One Nights. That oil-lamp between two hammocks is Aladdin's lamp. Time passes. Sorrow has fled upon the wings of music.

Sometimes a Spanish patrol intervenes and cries "Silence!" for form's sake. A few Gold Flakes are enough to pacify them. Gold Flakes have a magnificent effect on troops under arms, and even more so on the clerks in the office. They are offered in an elegant yellow box to a N.C.O. who neatly extracts five and departs well pleased. Goldis, the baptized Jew, cranes his long beaked nose over a white sheet of paper, absorbed in his obsession—the device of the coloured parachute. Formerly an assistant chemist in the laboratory of Vienna University, he is lost in anguished astonishment because the armies of

the Right and of Democracy do not use green parachutes over green fields, blue or grey over the sea, and yellow over sand. Why has no one ever conceived the idea? He has his plans all ready, yonder in his drawer. He is also studying Arabic, the School of Cordova, Averroes, the elixirs and alembics of the age of the Ommeyyads. At the same moment, Platanoff, captain of the 8th Hussars in the Imperial Russian army, lies dreaming, beneath the portrait of Nicholas II, of Taganrog, his native city, of the horses of the Don, of the Orloff trotters, the Cossack mares, the English thoroughbreds introduced into the Imperial studs. He is a man of knowledge, adept in aristocratic genealogies, Napoleonic studies, and everything connected with the horse. He left the Crimea in 1919 with Wrangel. Evacuated to Salonika, he served in the army of Syria, in the cavalry and then in the First Foreign Cavalry of Morocco. Two years of taxi-driving in Paris, a gentleman's education in the service of the Tsar, three years of prison in the service of Franco, had made of him a man of much experience. He was naturally at ease in every sort of company, never embarrassed nor making others so. When he had drunk a good deal, he would embrace any and every cavalry officer with much fervour, but he confined his affectionate demonstrations to cavalry officers. I knew him well. Many hours I spent in his company, discussing his cousin Stolypin's agrarian reforms, the pedigrees of the Russian nobility and of the equine race, seated on his bed, which together with the portrait of the Tsar Batouchka were his sole possessions. He shared a cubicle with one Golubeff, son of a millionaire archaeologist, a keeper at the Guimet Museum, who had carried out explorations in Indo-China. He, too, was a pure-blooded Paris Russian, once a cadet at the Naval Cadet School, who had served as barman at the Hotel Splendide at Palma de Majorca. That cubicle was my Jockey Club. There one could, as it were, re-read the bound volumes of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* of the days of Brunetière, and practise poverty with elegance and simplicity.

Often when I had been duly issued with my thirty-five *pesetas* did I rove from hut to hut, from nine at night until three in the morning. At the Penguins, two Amsterdam students used to play the guitar. At No. 24, a Slovak played the violin with the most heart-searching virtuosity. At No. 19 there was a gramophone which rattled out in most agreeable fashion the

sonatas of Chopin, and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, in complete darkness. The Poles scarcely ever played Chopin in broad daylight because of the emotions it aroused. Chopin tipped them over into tears. Just like the prisoners of the Carcel Modelo, who would not talk about their children, the Poles of Miranda refused to play Chopin waltzes in public. Chopin's music awakened visions of their families, and all the world of sentiment—serenades in the moonlight, the festivals of Spring and Youth, and the awful melancholy that haunts all prisoners at every turn of their existence. Fortunately, all this was merely life as lived on the surface of the earth; there was another life that went on underneath it.

CHAPTER 18

Tunnels

A SPANISH N.C.O. once observed with justice that the Poles always had one idea in their heads, and one idea alone: how to get out of the place. And that was true. That slim and handsome Pole with the antelope eyes, who talked French like a Latin Quarter student, was obsessed by one idea: so, too, was another who played the guitar and got up a Polish choir to sing popular songs. Indeed they all had but one idea. They were working at a tunnel.

For what could they do in their desolation save dig a tunnel? Some, by bribing the sentries, got through the barbed wire at night, but those who followed them were in their turn betrayed and denounced to the authorities. One Pole escaped in the dirty-linen cart. There was nothing for it but to dig a tunnel. Every evening when the huts were full of men who sang and wept and drank, the gang of diggers went off to their labours: and in the unlikeliest of places. The chapel sacristy. The chapel, as I have mentioned, was rather like a summer-house. Behind the heavy barred door there were three steps leading up to the altar, and under these steps a hollow space, an ideal starting-point for such an enterprise. Slowly, very slowly, the passage lengthened: lamp in hand the toilers removed the

earth in large buckets and scattered it on the football ground. All due calculations had been made.. The passage had to be sunk two and a half yards under the ground, thence to curve obliquely towards a marked point outside, beside a large bush. Three weeks passed. Certain Poles have a strange inclination to let their beards grow. One became insensibly accustomed to these hirsute miners' faces. The intention was that once outside they would promptly cut them off to alter their appearance. Alas, the tunnel was only too popular. Now that it was making progress, anyone was welcome to take a hand. Every night was spent in these titanic labours. In the daytime the toilers slept. These somnolent Poles, who only got up to eat and sleep, were despised as idlers. "*Ganduleria*" ("A pack of lazybones") said the Spaniards, as they passed their hut. Well, they did six hours' work every night under ground, flat on their bellies with their feet lashed together. Indeed it sometimes happened that the excavator was suddenly overcome by asphyxiation and ceased to move. The next man then had to pull him out by the feet, but sometimes only one foot could be found. The other leg, paralysed with exhaustion, lay half dislocated somewhere in the darkness. Picture the resulting struggle against death, the sweat of anguish, the sandalled foot that does not reappear, and the other foot that must not be pulled too hard, for fear of breaking a leg. When the pair emerge, the rescuer is almost as asphyxiated as the rescued. Fortunately tubes of oxygen are available in the camp. In its later stages the work proceeded by electric light. It was making good progress. That was when I learnt to appreciate Polish doggedness. One sole mishap: the calculations had gone wrong, and the tunnel would emerge, not under the above-mentioned bush, but at the foot of the railway embankment. No matter. They would get out all the same. The great night, the night of escape, eventually arrived. Three Poles disappeared, and got away, on the orders of the senior and superior officer, a major. The rest of the company received their last instructions. Out of the corners of their eyes the Poles kept that railway embankment under constant observation. There it was, forty yards beyond the barbed wire.

One morning the whole scheme collapsed. A truck-load of rubble was tipped on to the side of the line, just at the exit from the tunnel. The orifice appeared, the game was up, and the

whole thing reported to the Commandant of the camp. That was the end of that tunnel. That evening, in the darkness, there was much agonized playing of Chopin on Polish violins.

Next day the Poles began another tunnel. It failed more lamentably still. For the system of the tunnel, once disclosed, enveloped the excavators with an almost visible glory, and much rivalry ensued. Other Poles, in the depths of huts Nos. 6 and 8, started a double tunnel, the two shafts of which were to join like a pair of scissors beyond the barbed wire. Rarely, in the course of their magnificent story, can the Polish people have displayed so much discipline.

This is what happened. A certain poor Pole, scantily endowed by nature, a dazed, half-maniac, half-articulate youth in fact, aspired to be included in the toilers at the tunnel. He was not wanted, and the others tried to put him off. Whereupon he started a private tunnel of his own. This was the third. Naturally these three tunnels could not advance without getting in each other's way. He had hardly got a couple of yards underground when the two other tunnelling gangs had passed the line of the barbed wire. The wretched man, working independently, had compromised everybody else. All was discovered: huts Nos. 6 and 8 were evacuated and surrounded by a cordon of armed police.

That same evening the storm burst. The miserable youth was caught and dealt with faithfully. His nose broken, his eyes blackened, he fled for refuge into the major's hut, where his pursuers could hardly dare to follow him. His wounds were dressed by the hospital orderly, and he lay swathed in compresses and wept. Suspicion centred on the major, and even more on his nearest neighbour, Goldis the Jew, the baptized renegade, who was studying chemistry and Arabic. How much had he heard of the too frequent confabulations held in the major's hut? A pogrom was imminent. The major, as an officer and a gentleman, protected the poor baptized Jew, with his nose like a crooked forefinger, who thenceforward was careful to conceal his labours on synthetic petrol, and parachutes, whether green, or blue, or grey. There were five or six cases of lynching none the less. The Jews in the camp became more polite and accommodating, and less intrusive for a few days; and prices in the black market dropped. Chopin was much in

fashion : drink and those mournful cadences filled the darkness with anguish and despair.

Infection quickly spreads, and the tunnel problem, which had hitherto been an exclusively Polish one, became Belgo-Polish on the day when it was established that the Belgians were never likely to get out of the camp above ground. For the digging of a mine, and the proper conduct of such an enterprise, a certain unity is needed, a common discipline, a national spirit in fact. A handful of Belgians came together—which is what they can never succeed in doing except in times of trouble—and set to work. Everything combined to indicate that the job had now become impossible. After the exploits of huts Nos. 6 and 8, and the disaster brought about by the half-wit, the Spaniards started systematically tearing up the planking. Two or three times a week they came round with fixed bayonets and prised up the floorboards by way of making sure that the earth was solid underneath. Then they sifted the surface soil, and covered it with a layer of concrete. It was not till then that the Belgians breathed again.

The Belgians just split the concrete, prising up a little earth until the aperture was wide enough to admit a man, and the work of sapping made swift progress. Early in the morning, just before the first bell, the workers replaced the slab of concrete, carefully masking it with cement. A sprinkling of dust, a mat, and the corner of that hut looked as innocent as any other. As always, those who had dedicated themselves to these exhausting labours spent their days in repose. They were punctual, diligent, docile, and unobtrusive. The night indeed sufficed to sate their appetite for action. In three weeks their labours had so far advanced as to be nearly complete. A sergeant of gendarmerie had directed the enterprise, a tall and powerful fellow who impressed his companions by his energy, and the Spaniards by his excellent behaviour.

The most essential point was not to attract the attention of the Spaniards, and the warrant-officer commonly known as Spring-heel. This personage was a stocky brute who had stopped a bit of shrapnel in his leg during the war. He limped badly and could not go his rounds without a stick, with which he used to help himself along and to poke into inconvenient places. Spring-heel knew that tunnels existed. The smell of them was

in the air, in the very atmosphere of the camp. The informers—for there were informers in that camp—would only give him a hint or two of what was going forward. It must be a singular life for a man in authority who, knowing himself detested, sees nothing but evil purposes in the most ingenuous of countenances. Nor is he wrong.

The riskiest moment since the installation of the concrete pavement was the hour of cleaning, the hour of the *limpieza*, when all the prisoners had to join in a thorough clean-out of the huts. All the beds and equipment, arrayed outside, looked exactly like an open-air junk-market where every sort of object was on sale (what, indeed, in a camp was not for sale?), but where nothing was ever sold. Every man kept a watchful eye on his belongings during the cleaning process, for temptations and opportunities were many. Moreover, while the cleaning process was on, each squad appointed a warden, who lay motionless upon a bed, keeping a watch on a number of other beds on which were piled fantastic heaps of nondescript possessions. Then we trooped back into our scrubbed and disinfected huts with all the clatter that accompanies the striking of a camp. But for the absence of donkeys, dogs, and fowls, one might have been in Algeria, such were the smells, the dust, and the insistent fleas.

The pavement also had been washed. Spring-heel had paid his visit, tapped every foot of it with his stick, and departed satisfied. The Belgian squad lay wearily prostrate, awaiting the night.

Night fell at last, and I scarcely dare to record all that happened, it sounds so improbable when set down in detail. The work was nearly completed and the leading digger, who was to open out the exit, at last glimpsed the sky, the stars, and the moon. After three weeks of subterranean toil, of a troglodytic and reptilian life of sweat and suffocation, the end was near. He was a corporal in the 2nd Lancers, a well-set-up lad of nineteen, son of a gendarme, an excellent soldier, and as lithe as a cat. His feet were lashed together, and he gripped the earth beneath him. At last he could hear the noises of the countryside, the sentries' cries of "*Alerta!*" and the thudding tramp of the patrol. Very carefully, and with his bare hands, he opened out the orifice. It was then, at that precise moment, that a patrol passed. It may have been that his eyes were

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CHAPTER 19

Days of Depression

MIRANDA mirrored the burden of depression that had descended upon Europe in 1942. At the morning roll-call I saw depressed faces all around me: at the evening roll-call, the same faces equally depressed. Every man of them, however light and lively on the surface, was always wondering when he would get away. Others dropped limply on their palliasses. A Serbian engineer, an old student of Ghent University, told me how he used to go to the same cafés as I had frequented twenty years before. Then he would add: "This business is going to do me no good: and I admit I'm depressed." I was quite sure he was. Casimir and Heinrich, two gigantic Poles, chemists by profession, had set up as distillers. In their little room, next door to mine, they had established an elaborate contraption of lamps and retorts, and from a dozen bottles of red Rioja they daily produced a quart of spirit, and quite passable stuff too, which flared up if a match was set to it. They looked very handsome, these two sons of Poland, as they pursued their alchemistic labours by the flickering candle-light, searching for the recipe for happiness. Sometimes, after these long séances, the pair would settle down to drink, but Casimir was dangerous when he got drunk. If he happened to be intoxicated at the time of roll-call, he appeared on the Place du Generalissimo Franco in a little short fur-coat, and pretended to be skating, as though he were speeding over the lovely lakes of his native land, and then fell down full length with shouts of laughter, and made as though he were picking up handfuls of snow. Then he would start declaiming against the futility of governments, and return to the huts yelling: "*Abajo los Tyrannos. . . . Abajo los Dictaduras. . . . Abajo. . . . Abajo. . . .*" By the time he got to bed, exhausted and still grandiloquent, he had descanted upon all the great problems of our age, and was whole-heartedly intoxicated. The goddess Alcohol had warmed his youthful heart. He snored like a Gypsy's bagpipe. Next day I used to chaff him.

"You were very gay yesterday, Casimir. . . ."

"No, M. Ashley, I was sad, and very sad. I was trying to find a cure for what you call . . . What *do* you call it?"

"Depression."

"That's it. Yes, M. Ashley. Rioja spirit lifts it, if only for a moment, but that's always so much to the good. . . ."

Poland had become inured to suffering,—there is, indeed, no getting used to the burden of depression. Serbia too, and France and Belgium. A commission of Spanish officers, who came to inspect the camp, would sometimes give orders for all the foreigners to be paraded past them in quick-step while the band played a crashing infantry march. We must have presented a fine spectacle on those occasions, especially the officers' platoon, unshaven, ragged, decrepit, a motley of all nations, and the Spanish officers saluted us, as we passed with "eyes right." Indeed a colonel actually came to inspect us one day, an imposing colonel with a Habsburg chin, jet-black moustache and a peanut complexion, but as elegant as an infanta, and much addicted to pedantic etiquette. At his heels came two tall olive-complexioned lieutenants, and a diminutive bugler brought up the rear, a dark-eyed urchin who marched with magnificent aplomb and effect. And the prisoners, as they watched him pass, wondered one and all how long this sort of thing would continue.

The Greek tinkers, who made and soldered teapots out of jam tins, loved to contemplate the clouds sailing overhead; and so did the Croats who spent their days making souvenir rings. White metal souvenir rings were immensely popular among all the prisoners. At Barcelona a positive industry of the kind had been created, in collusion with the warders. Every inmate was anxious to adorn himself with a large ring bearing the letters C.M. : Carcel Modelo. Apparently those who have sojourned in the realms of nightmare find a pleasure in preserving some trifle which serves to remind them all their lives of that same nightmare. As for the Croats of Miranda, they worked to make a bit of money, and to lift the burden of depression. At hut No. 21 lotto was played all day, from morning until night, except during the two hours of siesta; and all the peoples of the Carpathians, all the migrants from all the little kingdoms of Jehovah, cheered themselves up by shouting their stakes and rattling counters in a bag, while awaiting the eternal Diaspora of Europe: next year at Jerusalem. Hut No. 24 was entirely populated by Spaniards camouflaged as Chileans or Venezuelans.

The barber had even declared himself an Egyptian subject, in order to claim British privilege, but the British Embassy, in the face of his complete ignorance of French, English, and Arabic, had abandoned him to his melancholy fate. The *cabo* of No. 23 was much less afflicted by the prevalent depression than the rest. He was a Socialist journalist from Hamburg who had served in a labour battalion in Germany, and for him Miranda represented a step forward in the amenities of life. He was looked after by the Quakers and the American Red Cross. Count Neuwirth liked him and described him as the cleanest Jew in the camp. Count Geisa de Neuwirth, a monarchist journalist from Budapest, a victim of the Nazis, was in Spain when the Gestapo there uncovered his activities. After a year of imprisonment and torture, of which the bastinado was not the worst he had to suffer, he had ended at Miranda. As *cabo* of hut No. 21 he had paid particular attention to the Belgians, over whom he wielded a truly magisterial authority, and indeed one of the most notable sights in the camp was to observe this magnate exercising the most unquestioned control over a collection of very dubious denizens of Brussels, Liège, and Charleroi.

This Magyar aristocrat treated the Spanish personnel with contempt. When we tried to mitigate the sergeant-major's severity by a present or two, Neuwirth, who had had two years' experience in Spain, used to mutter: "That's not the way to do it, gentlemen, that's not the way at all. No. Treat them like performing dogs or circus animals. You give them Gold Flakes before they have done anything to deserve them. Wait: let them do their little trick once, and, so that there be no mistake, let them do it again. Then, and then only, make your acknowledgement, and they will duly be grateful." In the morning, when the prevailing depression began to creep upon me, I used to lay in a stock of endurance from this man's society. He would tell off all the Belgians in his hut: some were easy in the hand, some were good fellows, some less so; while some few were men and brothers. It was he whom I had seen the first night, arrayed in white pyjamas, standing in a beam of moonlight, chanting in a baritone voice: "*Imaginario . . . Imaginario.*" The Belgians, double-dyed Democrats as they were, seldom called him anything but "the Count," and thus addressed him. For the Belgians have always been rather prone to rank and privilege. Count Neuwirth was unrivalled

at discovering what a man really was. There was an Albanian who haunted the neighbouring hut, about whom he said one day: "I'm sure I've seen him before, at Zagreb railway station, peddling neckties which he carried over his arm. . . ." As indeed do many vendors of neckties in the towns of the Near East and the Balkans. Two days later, this same Albanian came to him complaining of a row he had had with Ladron, the noseless sailor of No. 25.

"And what is your complaint?" asked Neuwirth.

"He says he has paid for five ties, and it's a lie. . . ."

"You see," said Neuwirth to me, "I was sure I had seen him at his trade under the station porch at Zagreb."

As a good journalist, he perhaps exaggerated a little. He might have come across the Albanian just as well at Stamboul or even at Trieste. But it was excellent reporting all the same. In the same way he said of Parnès: "I've seen that fellow with his saccharine smile, around the Café de Paris, in the evening, selling tickets for dirty cinemas." In fact, Parnès was a Palestinian who had played some part in goodness knows what Syndicalist circle in Paris. He smiled, and like other Jews devoid of any sense of humour, he brushed our clothes and shoes with a tooth-brush while reading Blanchard's excellent treatise on European geography. He spoke and read Italian and French, his native tongue was Hebrew, his native town was Jaffa, his home was hut No. 24, and his prevailing mood depression. Once, but once only, he did a hunger-strike to get even with Neuwirth, but Neuwirth, like the rest of us, knew what hunger was, and was not to be outdone. Parnès lost that encounter.

I was well acquainted with an old Turk, who had no appetite, and sold his bread for a hand at lotto. With what he won at lotto, he started 'a most profitable traffic in razor-blades and foreign currencies. He did not think much about the morrow, being quite content with what he made out of the day as it passed. Only natives of the West really understand the meaning of depression.

The malady of Miranda in 1942 was the malady of Europe; when everyone said: "For God's sake let there be an end of this. Either put me out of the way, or, if I am to get out of here, tell me when, at any rate within a few weeks or so." Such was Miranda, such was Europe, in the spring of 1942. I

read of happenings in France in the *Nouveaux Temps* or the *Voz de España*. Laval, as President of the Council, had appointed Bonnard Minister of Public Instruction, and Romier stayed at Vichy. My neighbour Casimir celebrated his first anniversary of imprisonment with a little party in his hut, so lavishly hung with pictures of the Virgin and rosaries. Tea in glasses was provided, together with cakes and nuts. Music in crystalline cadences was wafted by the chilly whistling draughts into every corner of our somewhat drab abode. In the infirmary, a new arrival, a Belgian student, quietly announced: "I feel rather ill. I've got pains in my legs. . . ." His temperature was taken. He had four degrees of fever.

Other Belgians came to see me on Sunday evening, and took me along to their quarters to offer me a drink and beg for news. One day a poor stupefied negro appeared, who was put to bed in a corner like a sawdust doll. A giant mulatto, very unsteady on his feet, used to pour out a brimming measure of wood alcohol into our only glass.

I caught a chill at Mass one foggy morning. All the following night I listened feverishly to the mutter of conversation. Old Colonel von M. was asleep, his forehead swathed in a white bandage, flanked by a glass of water and a night-light. My hearing had suddenly grown marvellously acute. I became aware of all the noises of the night, the eternal mutter of conversations that fever or imprisonment makes so meticulously audible. I was both feverish and a prisoner, and I think I then knew the meaning of what is called—Depression.

Here I must say another word about my first *cabo* at Miranda. The *cabo* or corporal, the head of the hutment community, was always a prisoner, but a prominent prisoner, almost a professional prisoner, who could talk enough Spanish to get on good terms with the regular elements in the guard-room. It was he who presided over the distributions of soup, assigned jobs such as cleaning and potato-peeling, and undertook to lead the platoon (each hut represented a platoon) to the Bandera roll-call. A few days' interval had to elapse before a man could be included in the officers' platoon, with the assent of the Spanish authorities. Meantime I was housed in hut No. 21, a rank-and-file hut, of which the *cabo* was the Hungarian, Count Geisa de Neuwirth. No bed. But was it worth while having a bed,

and lying in that four-legged contraption, when the floor served the same purpose so efficiently? I did not mind in the least any more than I minded the rats that scuttled all around, liking their share of the supplies provided by the British Embassy. Beds were rare. None the less, a bed could be had at the camp carpenter's shop for a matter of twenty-five *pesetas*, constructed from surplus timber for the camp. The carpenter made his five *douros* on the deal, and the Spanish authorities were the sole losers. Oil was indispensable to all our private kitchens, and its introduction into the camp was forbidden. Quarts of it were, in point of fact, obtainable. It could be procured through certain intermediaries at about five *douros* the litre, and here too it was the Spanish authorities who were mulcted, for the precious liquid was simply stolen from the kitchen, as was the wood from the carpenter's shop. A Spanish soldier got a commission. A Jewish prisoner pocketed the rest, and everybody was satisfied. Certain economic agreements had practically delivered Spanish oil to the Axis Powers, so that Spain, the largest producer of vegetable oil in the world, was officially deprived of it. I discovered later that the sale of this commodity was prohibited in Miranda town. The Spanish population bought it in the chemists' shops, in bottles duly labelled and stamped with the most various inscriptions. In the camp no such trouble needed to be taken. The thieving process was anonymous and sporadic. A little fatty liquid was surely required at the bottom of the pan for the proper poaching of eggs. The prisoners' skilly suffered accordingly, but what the poor prisoners resented was that Jewish usurers, who (it so happened) spoke German, supplied the stuff to the wealthier inmates. Indeed Miranda was a miniature of Europe, subjected to the laws of the New Order. Corruption thrived. Units of the Regular army formed the guard, and these were less amenable than the police, who, being less well paid, were more corrupt. In consequence we looked forward to the appearance of the *Policia Armada*, the equivalent of the Gestapo, which accepted all offers with open hands.

My first night was spent in quiet on my mattress. It was cold on that high table-land, and I piled six blankets as thick as stable blankets on top of myself. The *cabo* appointed the night warden, who was called, as a matter of routine—I never knew why—*Imaginario*. *Imaginario* remained standing all night in

the cold. I don't know for what dereliction of duty he was that night reprimanded at four o'clock in the morning. The *cabo* Neuwirth appeared in a beam of moonlight. He was a tall man of powerful build. He murmured in a brazen voice: "*Imaginario*. . . ." Then I saw his silhouette in light-coloured pyjamas. . . . Again he said, loudly and with emphasis, "*Imaginario*," and moved two paces forward.

At the third "*Imaginario* . . ." a sleepy, plaintive voice replied: "Yes, *Cabo*."

"*Imaginario*," repeated the voice.

"Yes, *Cabo*," replied the other.

It was a veritable Maeterlinck dialogue . . . and the rats . . . the rats scurried all the while over the flooring and among the tins of jam. I was very cold, and already at grips with the great enemy—Depression.

CHAPTER 20

He who does not Despair

THE best rewarded instance of warlike tenacity was that of a Pole at Miranda who, having abandoned any idea of getting across the barrier or the barbed wire, asked for and obtained his repatriation to Poland, into the hands of the Germans. From time to time the Gestapo sent certain emissaries to the entrance of the camp, with offers of liberation on conditions. And these were, for many, occasions of painful dilemmas. Certain Dutchmen, despairing of ever breathing the pure air of liberty, began to waver. This particular Pole did not hesitate. He accepted. For a while he was enveloped in an atmosphere of opprobrium. He was treated as a quitter, even as a suspect. He did not protest, and one morning the camp authorities handed him over to the German police, who clapped him in a cell at Hendaye, and consigned him to a camp in Silesia. Now this Pole had for a long time lived the life of an escaped prisoner. He could concentrate his mind without intermission on all the problems of escape. His life was a reflection of this ever-besetting problem. Now a man who really means to escape develops

marvellous powers of observation. Like the blind man whose senses of hearing and touch grow more acute, the would-be escapist acquires an astonishing perception of many things unobserved by the vulgar. There was no detail that our Pole did not notice on his journey, and then, as though by chance, he vanished, without leaving any traces, slipping away somewhere in the darkness, a shadow among shadows, in his old prison sandals. When I arrived in London, he too was at the end of his troubles. He had arrived from Miranda, but by a circuitous route.

I knew two Belgians, a merchant and a commercial traveller, honest Flemings both and inseparable companions, condemned as suspects in Belgium: and indeed they had found it indispensable to kill a Rexist lawyer in Tournai. A price had been put upon their heads. None the less they had been sent to Germany like so many others, in a convoy of prisoners, and there had lived under conditions of forced labour for several months. These Flemings soon learned German. They disappeared one night, revolted by prison life. "We really couldn't stand it any longer," they said to me ingenuously. They were making their way across country by road, when they were held up by an armed sentry. Weakened as they were, they disarmed the sentry and felled him in the half-darkness. "We ran off as fast as we could," they told me: "the fellow wasn't really dead. He was kicking like a rabbit." They were arrested at Valladolid. In Belgium there were still placards on the walls promising a reward of a million francs for discovery of the assassins of Tournai. My two friends in no way suffered on that account, but they were immeasurably bored. They had grown melancholy and embittered. Their captivity at Miranda lasted nearly six months, which seemed the longest in their lives, for there was wine to be had, but no work for them to do. In the evening when the younger man's misery passed all endurance, some occupation had to be found for him. He could not stand much wine, and when he exceeded, he paced up and down like a caged beast, his open shirt displaying a red and hairy chest, and with a baleful glare in his eyes. One evening when he had become really unbearable, I discovered an Argentine who had stolen from the canteen, and needed dealing with in proper fashion. I pointed out the Argentine,

who received so sound a thrashing that he finished the evening in the infirmary. My Fleming retired to bed, much relieved and cheered. He was shortly afterwards released and sent to London, where he remained for a while, very suitably employed.

A lad from my village spent in all ten weeks at Miranda, a brief sojourn which was very happily concluded. This eighteen-year-old schoolboy had spent long months in the process of getting to the Pyrenees. The Germans had arrested him in Paris and promptly sent him off to Berlin as a manual labourer. The youth did not protest, quietly worked in the German service for so long as was needed to collect a little money. He was imprisoned, like everybody else, and his head was shaved, as was done to everybody else. But he was released, being ranked as a special case, as I had been. Strange are the vicissitudes which this war may bring to mortal men. To us of Bruges, England is so very near. Stretch out an arm in peace-time and you can touch it; and the English come, in peace-time, for a week-end to Bruges, as they do to Calais. The Germans have decidedly acquired the gift of disorganizing human existence. My wife and children were then at Saint-André les Bruges, and here was I, in the heart of Old Castile, talking about my native village, on the way from Bruges to London, via Gibraltar, with a youth from Saint-André.

I came across a little mechanic from Verviers, a chubby little fellow, of an honesty and courage that quite won my heart. He took one year exactly to get to Gibraltar from Verviers, and it was at Gibraltar he first saw the sea. As far as Paris, he had found easy going: his sole possession was his bicycle, and on it he pedalled steadily along. He thus proceeded onwards to Bordeaux, where he sold his bicycle for nine hundred francs, which was more than was needed to get to Perpignan. He slipped out of the Germans' hands, but he was arrested in unoccupied territory by French gendarmes, consigned to a Youth Camp, whence he tried to escape, and being regarded as dangerous, was shut up at Vernet-les-Bains, a very bad camp, where, for the first time, he lost weight. But he did not stay there, and on this occasion he did succeed in getting clear away. Then the Belgian authorities agreed to take him over and look after him. He departed to Figueras, and was incontinently handed over to the *gendarmerie*. He greatly enjoyed his six weeks at

the Barcelona prison. At Miranda the time hung heavy on his hands. Sometimes he would clamber up to my attic, sit down beside me on my bed, and tell me all his troubles. The lad was exactly twenty years old, and as ingenuous and confiding as a child. Unlike the inhabitants of Bruges in general, he had never seen the sea. "Not even at Ostend," as he would add with emphasis. The day of his release was a great day for us all. He gave vent to his delight on that happy day with an exuberance that was as touching as his distress on days of gloom. I did not know before this war that I could become so affectionately intimate with an engineer mechanic from Verviers, but I had few such firm friends as this lad. He subsequently joined a parachutist unit, and though he had never touched an aeroplane nor a boat, he made the giddiest descents from sky to earth, and no man was more delighted with his job. His year of misery and suffering soon passed into oblivion.

Men forget so quickly, both the good things and the evil things of life. How often have I heard prisoners say: "Let us wait patiently for the end of the war, and our return to Brussels. Then—what a joy it will be to smash the windows of the Spanish Embassy! And the first Spaniards we meet—how we'll put them through it!"

But these resolutions do not, fortunately, hold. If vengeance were to be exacted for all injuries endured, where would be the end? Little companies of young Belgians set forth to make their way across France and Spain. They were horrified by all that they encountered in both those countries, beginning with the *gendarmes* of Perpignan or Carcassonne, who tried to stop these young Flemings from joining in the war against Germany. Before making acquaintance with the lice of Badajoz and Salamanca, they had known the bugs of Montauban and Marseilles. Many young men of sedate and quiet habits found themselves lined up in prison yards, and made to face the wall in files, while the warders yelled at them like convicts. Others, on the contrary, were treated with forbearance and a certain decent consideration. But all emerged from the ordeal embittered. With the result that, having known nothing of France except Anglophobe policemen and Germanophil newspapers, they generalized, and regarded France as an enemy country. They had made their way quickly across the North and Franche-Comté, so that they hardly knew those districts, which were

solidly patriotic and anti-German. Their sole enduring memories were of Perigord, and Auvergne and the Midi in general, a Midi full of songs and flowers, and administered by the minions of M. Pucheu or M. Peyrouton. Few of these young people had ever been outside their own country before. They drew conclusions quickly, and before they came to detest Spain, they had already despised France.

Still, there was a difference between Pétain's France and Franco's Spain: which was that in Pétain's country there was no killing, and in a Northern land this respect for human life is a thing that counts. Besides, everything is forgotten, even kindness.

Fortunately for the prospect of reconciling France with Europe, there was Richard White, commonly known as Fifi.

CHAPTER 21

Fifi

HE was a young University man, with amazingly fair hair and pink complexion, and the air of an Oxford eightman, whom everyone would persist in treating like a schoolboy, though he was well over twenty. He told me his history one evening when he was feeling particularly confidential. Sitting on a bed opposite mine, with dangling legs and twitching nostrils, with scarcely a movement of his hands, and blushing like a girl at a bantering remark or two I made, he told me what follows:

"Papa and Mamma lived at Soissons, where Papa was manager of a silk factory. I was at school at the local *lycée*, a mixed *lycée*, as indeed they mostly must be in small towns, and we all of us had a girl friend of our own. I had one called Edith, whom I always used to tease because she got into the same sort of troubles as I did. The philosophy master was a very fine fellow, a bit pompous perhaps, but immensely keen to train us to be good citizens of France. If we showed up a slovenly essay, he used to impress on us that this was the sort of thing that would lose us the next war. A defective shell, a sack of corn wasted, a lesson scamped, was so much lost to France.

Edith, of whom I was jealous, neglected her lessons scandalously. And yet our philosophy master, Owlet, was a good man."

"Was his name really Owlet?"

"No. We young rascals used to call him so. He was a Royalist, and a disciple of Maurras. One couldn't help teasing him a bit. Well, then the war broke out, and France fell. We cleared out, my parents in a car and I on a bicycle (with two of my mathematics primers), and so we crossed the Seine, the Loire, and various other rivers. Then came the Armistice. I was in the Creuse with my bicycle, where a number of young people had been evacuated. I decided to go back to Soissons, to see what had happened to the house, and get some sort of holiday. So I mounted my bicycle and hung on behind a lorry travelling northwards. Six hundred kilometres: a cheap trip, through Bourges and Château Thierry, where I saw the American monument. I still recall the town of Gueret, and my horror at seeing the crowds of people sitting outside the cafés drinking, smoking, and laughing about the abominations that were going on everywhere. At last, from town to town and lorry to lorry, I arrived at Soissons, where the British monument was no longer to be seen.

"Soissons was empty, horribly empty. So was the house. I was filthy and I cleaned myself in the wash-house sink with water from the garden hose. The entire population had withdrawn. That was the stock phrase at the time. Germans and Austrians were encamped everywhere, and all the time great columns of troops could be seen moving up towards the coast. Our next-door neighbour, M. Pistache, had wanted to hide his wine in the garden—bury it, I mean, which was obviously the sensible thing to do. But his wife was even more tenacious of what was hers. She was afraid that the process of burying the wine might destroy the mixed flower border which was her special pride. So the Pistache family's wine was not buried, and the Germans drank it, which provoked a domestic crisis between Eulalie Pistache and her husband. Wasn't that a singular example of the French possessive instinct? Good Beaune and Armagnac thrown away to preserve a bed of flowers. At last I managed to settle down in the house, doing my own cooking and living on garden produce. I ate nothing but salad and eggs. My parents came back. One fine evening I heard the horn of their Rosengart car. They had some difficulty in

recognizing me, because I had of course been tanned to a bright red by all my bicycle journeys in the back draught of lorries, and I had had some difficulty in getting the white road-dust out of my hair. But I had reflected a great deal on what had happened, on the warnings of my old philosophy master, the Owllet, and on Madame Pistache's remarkable conduct.

"Next day my father started work in the garden, foreseeing a shortage of food. I got news of my pals, the living and the dead, whose photographs were set out from right to left of the mantelpiece, the dead standing on the right. . . .

"I listened to the de Gaulle radio, and one morning I went off on my bicycle, without a word, or a penny in my pocket. But I was eighteen. In less than a fortnight I was at Perpignan. Then I crossed the Pyrenees.

"They looked very fine, the Pyrenees, at Fort de Carol, the October sun sinking like a golden globe over the blue ridges, the sea in the distance; and in the valley, wreathed in the icy mist of early morning:—Spain. We met some Gypsies, some cows on the white roads with bells on their necks, beneath a rose-coloured castle. It was the very embodiment of adventure and romance; war perhaps might be round the corner, and revenge. Anything might happen. What did happen was that the *alguazils* arrived.

"My first prison. Who could then have predicted that it was to be the first of eighteen? It was not a bad sort of place, and fairly warm, a disused church full of Catalan smugglers and Republican volunteers, and also of music of various kinds (including a jazz band), fruit, anarchist talk and literature. My companions used to say they weren't merely fighting with pistols but with books as well, and they invited me with much ceremony to 'cultural evenings.' It was all very interesting. I was bundled back to France via Bourg Madame, and into the prison at Perpignan.

"This was an authentic French prison of the genuine Vichy brand, in the Rue Général de Noguès. I was flung into a little room full of rather special cases, among whom was a Communist named Putsch, and a Baron arrested in the preceding spring by Paul Reynaud, who was himself at that time under lock and key. There was also a M. Boucabeille, head master of a school in Chile, and a M. Pinard, with one shoulder higher than the other, who was never tired of observing that the Law was unaccount-

able. Other inmates were a Gypsy, and a Police Commissary implicated in smuggling absinthe. The chief warder was a Pétainist and had a son at Saint-Cyr. You can picture that sturdy little patriot, I dare say. Well, I learnt a good deal while I was there. Oh, I forgot the Indo-Chinese whose utterance was limited to 'Yess. . . . Yess.' When the gendarme came to turn the rusty old key in the cell door, we all used to chant: 'Listen, oh listen to the rattle of the lock.' I never forgot that refrain, and some of us introduced it into our . . . subsequent prisons.

"Meantime we had to appear before a court, a kind of ceremony which, as I was only eighteen, reminded me strangely of the prize-givings at school. The prize-winners were called up one by one. The Public Prosecutor, confronted by the Indo-Chinese, roundly abused him as 'one of these foreigners who eat up the French people's white bread.' And the Indo-Chinese replied: 'Yess. . . . Yess.'

"I was No. 10. My advocate, a young barrister appointed by the court, mumbled feebly in my favour: the court pronounced sentence: six weeks' imprisonment. The spectators protested. 'Silence!' cried the usher, a hunchback in spectacles. . . .

"So there I was, alone, flung out into the street, and rather annoyed by the whole thing. It was pretty irritating, you must admit. I promptly doubled back to Spain. The court and my advocate had taken the view that this would be a lesson to me, and that I should not start on any more adventures. So I was able to do so at my own convenience, and this time I became acquainted with the delights of the prison at Figueras. But I was not sent back to France, and I did my six weeks there: then, in *transitos*, via the Model prisons of Barcelona, Saragossa, and Irun, I was conveyed in a cattle-truck to Miranda. This time I was again denounced as French, and I demanded to be sent back to France. It was the spring: and I was sent to Pau.

"You can imagine what France was like: the enchanting little grey stone railway stations in Béarn, among the Pyrenees, emerging in the light of a February morning to the eyes of a student from the North. At Pau it was a day of festival, with 150 *gardes-mobiles* in their best uniforms lined up on the station platform to receive M. Peyrouton, Minister of the Interior. We were served with sugared milk, white bread and butter. Not until then were the wolves segregated from the lambs.

Among our number were fifty deserters who were carted off to Toulouse. Our bright little company was marched away to the Prefecture, in high good-humour, and looking down our noses at the passers-by arrayed in cuffs and neckties, just like ourselves six months before. A few Boches in uniform were strolling unconcernedly along the streets.

"The prison was more prepossessing than that of Perpignan, and I soon introduced the refrain, 'Listen, oh listen to the rattle of the lock.' Obviously I was a veteran, a genuine old lag. I seized the atmosphere of the place from the very first day, and 'Listen, oh listen to the rattle of the lock' was unanimously adopted as a signature-tune. To set a fashion is a knack, which a man has or hasn't. Incidentally, the road from the station to the prison, with gendarmes on either side of us, was like every road to every prison, both in France and Spain. Fine broad streets, then smaller and more picturesque streets, then the outer avenues, and then—an ill-smelling guardroom, iron bars, and rattling locks. However, I got away from Pau pretty quickly, because when I was asked why I had crossed the frontier, I answered: 'To botanise in the Pyrenees. . . . I'm a botanist.'

"Oh glory, when one fine morning, a Sunday morning, we were lined up in the gallery behind a warder who was carrying a bundle of printed papers, on which one of us managed to read the heading: 'Discharge.' It was true. In the guardroom we had to sign one or two documents . . . and then—then we were free, and stood like men beatified on the open street staring at the cafés opposite. They were prisoners' cafés, where we could behave as we liked, and the proprietor of the first we entered said: 'We get used to it, you know,' with the air of excusing himself for his more frequent customers. Then we all went to Mass, for this was a veritable act of Providence, and afterwards we men of the North drank a glass of beer. You should have seen us, by the way, at the distribution of ration cards, confronted by the girls in the Food Office. We adopted a bland, superior air, dirty as we were, and when we became annoyed by some tedious series of formalities, we pretended to scratch ourselves with great vigour. Nothing tends to speed up administrative operations so effectively as a sudden and obvious attack of the itch. These girls in the office were afraid of us, and, after all, fear is a sign of dawning admiration. Our

progress through Perigord and the Dordogne was worthy of Cyrano himself. . . .

"This time I made for Soissons. I arrived one evening, scratching. As you will find when you get out of here, you can't help scratching for quite a while after your release. Lice leave memories and habits which are difficult to shake off. At Soissons station I found a car marked 'Rue de Pampelune,' which gave me quite a shock. Spain seemed to haunt me like an obsession. The house rose up out of the darkness. I pushed open the garden gate, and then the front door. All was dark. My footsteps echoed in the hall. Suddenly I heard my mother's voice :

" 'Is that you, Christiane?'

"She took me for my young sister coming back from school.

" 'No, it's me, René,' I answered.

"You can imagine the effect, and all the fuss that followed. For a week I was the hero of the place, the cynosure of Soissons. I was pointed out with admiration in the street. I did throw my weight about a bit, even to old Owlet, who, like all teachers of philosophy, kept on saying: 'I told you so,' and to Edith, that pestilential little girl friend of mine, who after all had played her small part in the Disaster. One thing only did upset me, and that was the expression on my father's face. He indeed had really suffered under what had happened to France. He was humiliated, disgusted, stricken by misery and age. I found the photographs of my dead friends still on the right-hand side of the mantelpiece. And I made up my mind to get away again at once.

"One evening my mother said to me: 'Well, we must think about your future.'

"I went off again the next day.

"Prisons at Barcelona. I was in two of them at Barcelona, the Carcel Modelo and Montjuich, the military prison, and the approach to them was always the same: fine broad streets, then narrower and picturesque streets, then the outer avenues . . . and then bolts and bars. I described myself as a cadet from the Artillery College at Sandhurst. Which was a little awkward, as the Colonel-Commandant of the prison was an artillery officer, and if he had asked me too many questions I should have been extremely embarrassed. Fortunately the

could read enough Spanish to understand the exalted science of gunnery, aided by the explanations of a few obliging companions. From my cell I could see the Mediterranean, and the liners glittering with lights as they steamed out to sea. Sometimes we caught a waft of music from their bands. On Sundays we received visitors, and the ladies of Barcelona brought us offerings for lunch. We made up to the girls, who were astonished that a Britisher like myself spoke Spanish so fluently. Well, a year spent in gaol teaches a young man many things. In the evening we played chess. My Spanish opponent accused me of timidity. 'You are all the same, you English,' he would say. 'You are always on the defensive. Why don't you attack? When will you acquire the true spirit of the offensive?' Finally, I was sent back to Miranda.

"The officers of the guard had been changed. Not one suspected, or even seemed to suspect, that this was my second visit. After all, the place is a kind of railway station through which they see so many people pass. I've been here four months now, and I've been on my travels for nearly two years. I don't know when I shall see the end of it all. I'm behind my time, I know that much. But I suppose the British Embassy isn't taking a great deal of trouble to get me out. No doubt they have other protégés whom they think likely to be more profitable than myself."

Every Wednesday when the British Attaché came to fetch a few of the recent releases, often far less deserving than himself, Fifi hung about the office, his ineffably pink countenance and his fine bold handsome features registering anger, humiliation, and gloom, but never a sign of envy or jealousy. Thus he attained his twentieth year. I have seldom been present at a more moving anniversary than the birthday of this lad, who had reached maturity during two years of prison life, had learned English and Spanish, and judged humanity without pity and without bitterness: for such is the effect upon the mind of cell and hutment life. There is no horror and no depravity which Fifi had not witnessed, no crisis which he had not overcome. The lad did good by merely showing his fine, honest, ingenuous face. "You know," he said to me one evening, "that in my profession as prisoner we often assist at the transition from greatness into decadence. I have known vainglorious and boastful men, possessed of money, in *transitos* between Figueras

and here. A few months later I met them on my second visit standing in the snow with chattering teeth and a sack over their heads, offering cigarettes and muttering: *'Se vende, se vende.'* Beggars, scratching their sores."

He had suffered from hunger in a Barcelona prison cell. He was a purist. I used often to give lectures. He suggested that he too might deliver a talk, on the soul of France, and showed me the synopsis of what he proposed to say. This same talk, if he had given it, would certainly have been a creditable effort, but I doubt if it would have had much success. It was a narrative of the great days of France, from the Crusades down to Foch and Clemenceau, and including Joan of Arc and Voltaire. It was rather like an essay by a conscientious school-boy, and would have fallen very flat. When he discoursed to me about it with much gravity in my cubicle, sitting on a bed, with all his characteristic jerky charm of manner, I used to answer: "Yes, a fine, a very fine subject, and admirably handled": while I wondered how on earth I could stop him from embarking on this performance, which would have indeed been a tedious imposition on a public like ours. . . .

Fortunately, by perpetually postponing the date of his lecture, we managed to hold matters over without giving him offence. One Monday evening the news came that he was due for release two days later. It was nearly midnight before the rumour was officially confirmed. Should he be awakened? We decided that it would be best to convey the good news to him at once. And so it was done. He was then housed alongside a Cuban negro, known ironically as Blonde Rubio. The black was by inadvertence also awakened and heaved a gentle sigh. Our voices roused him like a rallying-call from his slave ancestors, bringing a sudden vision of a long procession of prisoners and outcasts to prowl around his bed. Fifi, on awakening, rubbed his eyes. His first words were, of course, "No, it isn't true. I won't believe it until afterwards. I've heard that story too often during the last two years." But he was compelled to recognise that it was so. He bore his joy sedately, keeping himself in hand, and indulged in no undignified exuberance. His studies of the Greek and Latin humanities, old Owllet's philosophy classes, and much suffering, had made a man of him.

As he passed the barrier, he threw a final glance at me and winked. I turned back into the camp, reassured and cheerful,

saying quietly to myself: "Well, he's out of it: a good lad, one of those that Kipling called a man's man."

CHAPTER 22

Cross of Lorraine

OLD Clisson was a painter and a Socialist, one of the best of men, eloquent, discreet, distinguished, with a short white beard. His painting wasn't up to much, but his conversation was pure gold. A clean-cut Socialist, of the high-minded Ruskinian type, a man and a brother, without a touch of malice, incredibly individualist, who had consistently refused to be repatriated to France and stayed on at Miranda simply and solely in order to avoid a Vichy prison. Among so many Frenchmen I saw pass through the camp there were a few classic types like Fernand Lefèvre, the airman, and Fifi, the patriot student, both finished examples of their kind. M. Clisson was an artist, quite unattached, or without any sort of middle-class prejudice, an aristocrat in fact. When he was asked where he would go on leaving prison, he answered: "Anywhere—straight in front of me. . . . There's enough room by the roadside to sleep and eat a crust. . . . After all, there's always a meadow, and sometimes a hay-loft." He would dilate on all this, without emphasis, and with a great deal of noble simplicity and genuine candour, as he tramped for many a mile, back and forward, over the hundred yards of paved walk which served as a promenade for all the camp.

In a world so utterly denuded, traits of character are observable in the raw. No concealment is possible. Every human being becomes a prototype. Two medical students from Paris University talked, read, and argued just as violently as do the young medicos of the Boulevard St. Michel, outside Capoulade's or Dupont Latin, in the evening, when they come out of lecture. Or they laboured at their text-books, filling sheet after sheet of foolscap with voluminous notes, just as they used to do at that same hour under the chestnut trees of the Luxembourg, looking up now and again at the old gentlemen playing bowls or croquet.

When one of them undertook to deliver a public lecture, it was a very ceremonious affair. He had chosen as his subject "The Latin Quarter," and he was as excited about it as if he was really holding forth upon his own native heath somewhere between the Rue Cujas and the Rue de l'Estrapade.

All these men, coming from such diverse conditions and environments, recognized each other by their choice of literature. What a medley of books I came across in that camp—detective stories, novels by Claude Ferrère, pious books, obscene books, revolutionary manuals redolent of dynamite, the stories of Alphonse Daudet, and treatises on political economy. Yellowed they were, and torn and dirty, dog-eared and broken-backed from much use, passed a hundred times from hand to hand, but in all of them the mind found refuge from the ever-present menace of boredom. Prisoners read much as schoolboys do, no matter what, just as it comes along, especially whatever may be banned. The International Brigade had their own library in their hut. So had the Poles, in No. 17. The Belgians had another, in No. 26, and the British in No. 18. All this literary give-and-take must have produced some odd results, scarcely analysable at the moment, but such as will certainly leave their mark on history. However international the reading public of the camp might be, French books were predominant, either in the original or in translation. Malraux, Duhamel, Proust, and Mauriac were all greatly in demand, and Turks and Bulgarians were to be seen deep in *Si le grain ne meurt*, by André Gide. French books are always to be found where men live and talk and suffer, with their eyes upon the horizon.

I came to know a little rustic from the Haute-Saône, a man of the Vosges, whose father had migrated from the Côté de Lure and was working on the Est railways. He himself was a farm labourer, not equal to much more than tending cows and carrying fodder. A youth of twenty, with a long, ruddy countenance, scanty teeth, and the tow-coloured hair so common in the countryside. Arrested for the first time at Gerona, sent back to France and imprisoned at Perpignan, he had received, like Fifi, a good prison education, but a short one. A second time he had crossed the Pyrenees and was again arrested. I have never seen a French peasant, from the land of Joan of Arc, display a Christian piety so nearly akin to that of Joan herself. "His is the faith of bygone ages," the Belgian chaplain said to me one

day. "He is a true type of the early Christian." He would calmly invoke the Virgin in the certainty that his prayers would be heard. "I shall be here for six weeks," he observed serenely: and he was right. The news reached him in the middle of the day, during the distribution of the soup. He dropped his bowl: then he recovered himself, his mobile toothless mouth melted into a serene smile, and he went as he had come, with perfect self-command. He too had never seen the sea. He met it first at Gibraltar.

I knew members of the Paris police, real detectives, from Districts V and VIII, and even XX, men of Issy and of Ménilmontant, familiar with all the tricks of the policeman's trade, including the arts of boxing and of Greco-Roman wrestling, in which they generously instructed their less-favoured companions. Such men, too, could be astonishingly chivalrous. One of them, knowing he was due for release on the following day, conceived the ingenious notion of presenting his order of release to a famous French airman, a senior inmate of the establishment, saying, like the gentleman he was: "You're a more useful man than I could ever be, sir: it's only fair."

Others of my acquaintance were garage hands—the lowest of the low; hairdressers' assistants; a brothel bully from the Avenue de Clichy who said, with a cigarette-end in the corner of his mouth: "I've got a girl friend working for me . . . on the streets." One was a sergeant in the Army Service Corps. I also fell in with M. Félix Gouin, Deputy for Aix-en-Provence, Léon Blum's counsel at the Riom trial. The oddest little fellow, fifty-eight years old, clean-shaven, with a strong Provençal accent, but enduring his misfortunes with the sturdiest good-humour. I was released exactly when he was, at the same hour and on the same day. For seven weeks I had seen him wandering about the camp in the company of M. Max Heymans, an ex-Under-Secretary of State and ex-millionaire. They were two very retiring prisoners, Gouin the little Provençal, and Heymans the tall Parisian. They went about in rags, never made any fuss, and always turned up for their soup long before the hour of distribution.

The soup drama at Miranda was indeed a symbol of those days. I have mentioned how the camp orderlies brought it along in huge open tureens, which duly collected all the eddying dust of Old Castile. And yet the prison soup was quite popular. I

have eaten two or three plates at a meal, and thoroughly enjoyed it. The main point was to arrive in time to get the first helpings. Queues were accordingly formed in the middle of the central yard. When the bugle had been blown, the first arrivals were the first served, whereupon, grasping their bowls, they took their stand opposite their original position and gulped down brimming spoonfuls of the green and reddish liquid, of which the chief ingredients were haricot beans and thick rancid oil. It was provender unknown, I believe, in any other camp in Europe, and by no means always bad. Sometimes it was made from green peas, but only on grand occasions, and even so was regarded as a luxury. The usual brew was much more homely, but in the brisk air of the high plains one was glad of a second helping, and the coarse beans of pulse which formed the base of it were not to be despised.

M. Gouin, Vice-President of the French Section of the Workers' International, Léon Blum's counsel at the Riom trial, M. Félix Gouin, Advocate of the Court at Aix-en-Provence, and an eminent Provençal scholar, M. Gouin, in sandals and a light-coloured shirt, stood spooning *rancho* out of a brimming bowl : and so did M. Heymans. No doubt they would have liked to take off both their jackets and their shirts. With their shaven skulls and sun-tanned arms, they looked like typical convicts. But prisoners were only allowed to strip at exercise : nudism was not permitted at meals. *Rancho* was served and eaten to the sound of the bugle, and in due routine. A man might indeed be dirty, and he might be verminous, provided he preserved the modicum of dignity which Spain requires in any official operation. M. Gouin and M. Heymans, fully clothed, leaned forward, tendered their bowls, and departed, and diving dexterously through the throng towards the rear, planted themselves opposite the queue. When everybody had been served, they were discovered at the head of the second queue, to whom the leavings were then ladled out. They executed this manoeuvre with infallible dignity, patience, and good-humour. Behind them, men shouted, protested, fought, and cursed in every sort of language, though Spanish of course predominated—prisoners are very quick to pick up their gaolers' blasphemies. But they, pillars of the Palais Bourbon, remained unperturbed. They waited their turn, like everybody else, but not uttering a word ; as quietly as did my friends the bear-leaders, for there were some

bear-leaders in the camp, as intent upon their soup as were MM. Gouin and Heymans.

CHAPTER 23

The Bear-Leaders and the Eaters of Dog

THE bear-leaders were two Bosnians, and very good fellows they were. They would sometimes show me their passports before the hour of soup. They had left their native mountains and set out on their travels, enjoying life and following their destiny along the high-roads of Europe, picking up pennies, and making their great, brown, noble bruins dance for the entertainment of the populace on fair-day evenings. Serbian passports, like all Balkan passports, are drawn up in two languages, the language of the country and French. A long tale of visas had duly accumulated on these imposing documents, so that the whole history of a bear-leader could be traced at all its stages across Italy, Switzerland, France, and Spain. One evening, after the outbreak of this accursed war, disaster had come upon them. Spain had no longer any use for Bosnian bear-leaders. Nor had France. Nor Portugal. Bosnia was groaning under the German boot. The two Bosnians crossed the melancholy threshold of the Mirandan purgatory, clad in all their finery of green jackets and red trousers, but so faded, so discoloured by the rains, that they were no more than shadows of their former glory. With their long moustaches and their flat hats, they still looked quite authentic: however, they queued up for cabbage and bean soup, just like Belgian soldiers, or French Deputies, but with what a fatalistic air! These Gypsies were of the Orthodox Faith, and when they passed the little chapel on the football ground they crossed themselves and fingered their wooden rosaries. But they were also Orientals. They made no recriminations against fate, they left everything to the future, which always and in the end settles the problems of the present. Here and now there was soup at midday, soup in the evening, and coffee in the morning. And, incidentally, these three

ceremonies occupied a great deal of their time. They took their stand, with their bowls at their feet, an hour and a half, sometimes two hours, before the bugle blew, to make quite sure of getting a proper helping.

How many hours they must have passed, motionless, and always standing, in the sunshine. In wet weather, too, with their backs against the wall, when the rain was hissing from the gutters, they stood at attention, the water pouring off their hats, their moustachios soaked, their fixed eyes staring into vacancy.

Once, and once only, I saw one of them weeping into his great Cossack moustachios, *à la* Budienny. He looked like a man who has lost someone very near and dear to him. I soon discovered what was the matter. His bear had had to be killed, his sole surviving bear. His wife and children had been keeping it for him in a cage at Madrid. But it cost too much to feed. For what is the use of a bear that cannot be led about and exhibited at fairs and markets on days of pilgrimage and festival? The hairy, kindly denizen of the Asian uplands could earn no money now. On the other hand, he had his value as butcher's meat. He had to be slaughtered: his throat was cut, and he finished on a butcher's slab. A whole street in Madrid hastened to buy bear-steaks, and made them into stews, on which starving families were glad enough to feast, shutting their eyes no doubt to help them forget that they were eating bear. Another old taboo exploded. And indeed, in times of famine people are very ready to eat dog.

But I could well understand the owner's grief. His whole profession had gone into the saucepan. The Bosnian wept. All his capital had vanished too. He had bought the bear at Hagenbeck's at Hamburg, Hagenbeck being the most prominent purveyors of bears on the Continent—400 marks for an untrained bear, 1200 marks for a trained bear. Such was the price of Bruin in the good old days. It was, of course, a bear from Asia or the Carpathians, whose parents and grandparents had already been German citizens. The Pyrenean bear, so my Bosnian Gypsy told me, is much too savage. He can never be really trained. He never condescends to behave himself with decorum, and rock himself to and fro to amuse the children, nor to dance to a concertina, nor do any tricks. He is liable to bite. He always remembers an injury, and revenges himself one day. Whereas the Hagenbeck bear can be so *gemütlich*, just like his

cousins in the children's picture-books. A bear can be a charming animal.

M. Gouin talked about the Riom trial, and the roadways of Provence. M. Max Heymans talked about Moscow, Berlin, London, and all the cities he had visited in charge of Economic Missions. The bear-leaders, two among so many wanderers perforce, talked little, told their beads from time to time, gazed at the wide horizon and the Castile road, sometimes soaking in the rain, sometimes thick with dust, waiting—waiting for the great day of peace, when they could set forth upon their wanderings once more.

I must add that, rough as our food usually was, dog sometimes figured on the menu. There were a few astonishing mongrels about, who gambolled in our little stream and scoured the camp for offal. The few Spanish N.C.O.s who owned such beasts were soon relieved of them. One day a Spanish dog, duly fattened on kitchen refuse, vanished. The Spaniards knew that he had been much attached to the Belgian sailors. Good, kind fellows were those sailors, and very fond of animals. It was known that they were great friends of the sergeant's dog. And indeed it had been quite touching to watch these rough tars' affection for the faithful, loving creature, who belonged to their prison warder. No doubt it was a father's or a husband's or a lover's fondness that could find no satisfaction otherwise. Who could tell? The tattooed frequenters of the sea are often kind-hearted. The sergeant unburdened himself to the Belgian seamen, who seemed much distressed. "We'll find him all right," said they. The sergeant went gloomily to bed, with a heavy heart, though he had not abandoned hope.

The sailors had indeed found that dog. They had strangled him quite humanely, cut him up, and thrown him into the saucepan, where the poor brute lay smoking, and smelling extremely good, duly seasoned with onions and herbs. He simmered over the fire like a rabbit, soaked in rough red wine. He would go no more a-roving after the bitches of the villages, his raids on kitchens were for ever ended. There was great joy among those mariners, who for so long had been irked by their confinement, and yet, behind that barbed wire fencing, sacrificed without a qualm their only companion who in that wired encampment had preserved the right to leave it without being shot. The beast's head and hide were found in the refuse-bins,

but the Spanish sergeant refused to believe his eyes. He had watched the martyrdom of many bulls and many men; but he would not believe that anyone could kill his dog. I shall always remember that white nose, those crushed ears, and empty hide, which took several days to decompose. The little Belgian sailors had dined well.

The Polish orderly had dined even better, and more often. He was indeed a very fine type of humanity. He enjoyed life, and was happy in prison. All he needed was four or six litres of red wine every day, and he drank them heartily, having earned them by the work he did, for he worked all day long.

He was a Pole from the Ukraine, with a genial visage traversed by an enormous moustache, and more elaborately tattooed than any human being I have ever met. From head to foot he was a positive panorama of design. Sirens, giants, helmeted Minervas, salamanders, marine monsters—everything that could be devised by the imaginations of the specialists in the great seaports to adorn a sailor's or a legionary's skin, had been lavished upon his. In the richly tattooed world in which I lived, I sometimes felt quite indecorous when I washed myself, for displaying a skin so virgin of frescoes and chromatics. He reminded me of the painted walls of Balkan monasteries. He was a Byzantine reproduction. Sometimes, no doubt, he must have been embarrassed by such an exhibition and wished himself rid of it. But how? A tattooed person is like a foundling child: he is marked for life. Besides, it was his glory. His long years in the Legion had implanted in the tattooed hero a deep pride in his profession. He had acquired a reverence for honour and discipline, and also for work. At times indeed he was seized by a craving that needed a great deal of wine for its appeasement. And this was why he functioned as orderly to a succession of wealthy fellow-prisoners. He washed their linen, cooked their food, peeled their potatoes, did all their heavy work, such as emptying the latrines—indeed he took charge of all they wanted done; and he was at it without respite from morning until night. Another sort of man, a Jew, would have earned the money by trade, and put it out at interest. But he earned his considerable stipend by the labour of his hands, and earned it gaily. Gaily too he drank it.

He drank like a peasant in Touraine or l'Hérault during the vintage; two litres at midday, three in the evening. At a time

when the citizens of Paris and Marseilles went short of table wine and quarrelled over a glass of vermouth, he ingurgitated like Rabelais in his native Anjou, and if he could get an extra bottle he didn't mind a sweat. He was a stocky, solid man, as were the Frenchmen of the days of Molière or Henri IV. Poland is from certain points of view very like an eighteen-year-old France. French Canada has remained at the same stage. My Ukrainian Pole had travelled widely in France, Germany, and North Africa. He knew many men and things. He, like the Belgian sailors, could make a dish of dog. He killed one, but instead of cutting it up, he roasted it whole. And I was given to understand that roast mongrel was delicious.

"I had always thought that dog had to be boiled," said my Ukrainian next morning. "I have often eaten boiled dog in other countries. But I have only come across roast dog in Spain. Well, we learn much from travel."

I too was adding to my knowledge. Captain Litvinoun, a handsome, white-haired Israelite from Serajevo, who had served in the International Brigades, talked to me of course about the Slovak question. My orderly, Jean, a Bessarabian, talked to me about his native land, so incessantly covered by the Russians or the Roumanians, or by both at the same time. Parodi, the man of Gibraltar, the orderly and general factorum in hut No. 17, was the typical industrious and bibulous Ukrainian. He would condescend to the most degrading jobs to earn his bread, but it was very special bread, accompanied by ham, and he ate it without bitterness. Parodi was a Gibraltar Spaniard who had served in the two Legions, Spanish and French, and spoke both languages. It was obvious that he was not well contented with his lot: but he accepted it with admirable dignity. Indeed, from more than one point of view he was an honest rascal. In this world outside the law, men took certain liberties with morality, as do many of our bankers and ratepayers, though the said liberties are not the same. None the less, Parodi had a firm grasp of the social contract. He did not thief indiscriminately. He would not eat anybody's dog. I always kept a few provisions in my box. Nothing was ever stolen, and I knew that in that light-fingered world no one would ever have thought of robbing me, because I was treated as a brother. These ruffians had a liking for me, and I fancy that in the Legion they would have regarded me as a man and a brother. I talked to them about their own

countries, nearly all of which I had visited in the course of my work as a journalist, and I could describe to them the sights and the cafés of their native towns. They regarded me, no doubt, as a man of much force and knowledge: a man of their own kind, in fact, but one who travelled with books in his baggage, and was reputed to have written some himself. This pleased me: I was inexpressibly proud of their confidence. The little Lithuanian barber, with his fine gazelle-like eyes, told me all his troubles and how bored he was with life. He lived opposite the Hungarians, to whom I would describe, in Spanish, the evenings I had spent at Kiss Patak and Arizona, the great night resorts in Budapest. They liked my stories: and we felt we were, in some measure, citizens of the same world.

CHAPTER 24

The Lunatic

THERE had not been a single lunatic at Miranda; whereas at the Carcel Modelo at Barcelona there was a positive posse of them, for Death has two little sisters, Hunger and Madness. But at the Carcel Modelo it was all in the day's work. Some clerk in charge of the guardroom used to say: "Mad, are you? Come inside." Then one lunatic did get into Miranda by inadvertence, a man with an obsession, whose proper refuge should have been an asylum. Our array of miseries, of which the most prominent were hunger, scabies, and disease, was now augmented by the malady of the mind. Many of us suffered from the malady of the soul, which they were often reluctant to admit, but which compelled them to say foolish and sometimes evil things. They could be solaced and soothed by gentle conversation, and especially by listening to their tale of woe, like children with some petty trouble on their minds. That gave them relief, and left the comforter with the consciousness of having done a good deed. But there was nothing to be done with or for a lunatic.

A man of middle height and middle age, with a gaunt, wizened

face, spectacles, and an air of no little assurance, he was a Frenchman, a *lycée* master, and much in favour, so he said, with one or more Deputies, as indeed was very possible. We used to wonder what part of France he came from: Savoy seemed likeliest. He was well read, and possessed by a sort of mystic mania. His ideal in life was to preach to the multitude, to pontificate in public, and sing the praises of the Lord. He was utterly bewildered by the environment of a concentration camp. Fate had appointed a meeting with him there, as with so many others, and he only seemed normal when he made plain that he was as eager as we all were to get out of it. This was with him, as indeed, with all of us, a fixed idea. He wrote to every known authority (and so did we all.) He, like us, would have tried every means, and taken every risk, to get himself extricated from this purgatory. He wrote to the Pope, of course, a long and admirable letter, just the sort of letter that a man in his right mind might have written to his Holy Father, if he had known the Holy Father personally. A trifling error of vision, and indeed a very excusable one, which exposed him as the simple soul he was. He committed others. He imagined himself a priest: assumed the tonsure—he actually shaved a small round patch on the top of his head—read his breviary, sang the Psalms, crossed himself and genuflected, rushed to the altar in the morning and rang the bells violently to summon the faithful to prayer. The Belgian chaplains, prisoners like ourselves, took care not to thwart him. A madman is twice a prisoner, being imprisoned also in his own illusions.

The neglect of the authorities in allowing such a poor irresponsible creature to go on in this way, without proper care or protection, was a thing that cried to Heaven. Our madman, not too mad to preach, darted from hut to hut, babbling, orating, and expounding the Sermon on the Mount. One day he said to me with an intent look in his eyes: "I have done a deed to-day. I have separated the goats from the sheep." I could not help being amused at these ebullitions: though he was indeed a painful object. To all the miseries of our lot he added yet one more—the spectacle of folly unrestrained. There were those who laughed and jeered at him as he passed; they found him funny. The more malicious positively followed him about. The young Belgian seventeen-year-olds (we had nine such schoolboys at one time) crowded round him and plied him with

gibes and questions. People would arrange to meet at his open-air conventicles, like those at the Marble Arch in London.

One evening, at the final roll-call, when the prisoners were arrayed before the platform for the ceremony of saluting the flag, our madman, at the sight of the officer of the guard ascending it, rushed up, breviary in hand, and arm outstretched in the Roman salute. He clambered feverishly up the steps and planted himself beside the officer. Two thousand men burst out laughing. The officer was tactful enough not to lose his temper. He gently took the madman by the arm and piloted him down again, talking to him in the soothing tones one uses to a sick person. That officer had a heart about him somewhere. Perhaps he felt the horror of the scene: a sick man made an object of derision. An alienist, or a priest, never dreams of laughing at a madman. Is a wounded man, or a cripple, considered funny? But the village lunatic is always surrounded by all the local urchins and old women. The negroes, in particular, were immensely amused by him, because negroes are themselves outcasts and objects of ridicule. All the sorts and kinds of prisoner who were genuinely wretched in their lives regarded someone thus afflicted as intensely funny. The admirable emotion known as pity has its limits. There are times when it fades from our minds and we cease to love our neighbour. One evening our lunatic appeared at the flag ceremony in his shirt, barelegged, his tonsured head uncovered. He had a rousing success. Never had the band played with such brassy resonance. The prisoners gave the Roman salute: "*Arriba España.*" The Poles laughed: the Hungarians laughed: also the Argentines, and especially our Stateless comrades, the ultimate derelicts, the Annamite, the Tonkinese, the three negroes, and Ladrou, the miserable Ladrou, wreckage of a man who, instead of a nose, displayed two gaping orifices in the centre of his face. Indeed his face was barely human. And he laughed till he was fit to burst.

A train passed by. A gust of wind whirled eddies of yellow dust over the assemblage. The bugle emitted a last blare. Translucently green against the distant sky gleamed the mountains of Castile. A pearly dusk came down upon the land. O God, how sad it all was! . . .

CHAPTER 25

Wolfus

I CAME to know a Fascist Jew who alleged he was attached to the Falange, and was much derided by the other Jews. I must have made it clear that the most sympathetic characters in the strange League of Nations were not the most deserving of compassion. This man Wolfus, a Hanoverian, was utterly wretched; he was a stunted little creature who always talked like one who had once been rich and well connected. His Spanish military cloak was his most notable possession, a garment of rough khaki frieze, of the kind that, when it rains, bestow upon their wearers an oddly bat-like appearance: the rest were—a mattress, a sackful of miscellaneous old frippery, and a plethora of lice. The Hanoverian had been there for two years. He talked English admirably, as well as French and Spanish, always using the more formal turns of speech and a rather academic vocabulary. One day I let fall a few words of Arabic. He could also talk Arabic. Then I tried a couple of sentences in Kiswahili, the mulatto language current over all East Africa. He could also talk Kiswahili. That time I was indeed taken aback. Wolfus had been in Abyssinia, to Lake Rudolph, with Febronius, who had been the leader of an expedition which went out in search of rock inscriptions. His hobbies were archaeology, the prehistoric ages, and the Hittites. He had a smattering of most subjects that were taught at the Sorbonne and the Académie. He might well have been a member of one of those coteries which sat at the feet of Mommsen and Niebuhr, in the days when Germany still gave birth to learned men. His appearance, indeed, suggested a cymbal-player in a Budapest night-house orchestra, performing among a group of grimacing violinists, as they pour forth soft, wild, wailing harmonies that shake the nerves like a narcotic or a drug. Wolfus was a stocky little object, almost a dwarf, of a repulsively Semitic type, with an enormous mouth, gapped teeth, and a sickly yellow face, a sort of graven image of grinning, swaggering, suffering humanity. He sniffed as he talked, in a husky, drunkard's voice, through an ever-running nose: but he was

a man of vast knowledge. I made his acquaintance at the hairdresser's shop. I was studying Russian at that time. Much may be learned at the hairdresser's in a Spanish prison. The great Golubeff, the fastidious Golubeff, master of many tongues, talked to him in that quietly familiar tone affected by the genuine aristocrat of every kind and country, who know that they can meet no matter whom, no matter where, without the slightest sacrifice of dignity, and maintain a lively conversation, because, above and beyond their erudition, they have the unchallengeable authority of race and breeding. Wolfus talked about stamp-collecting: it was that erudite personage's favourite hobby. He had learned the Russian alphabet in the course of a comparative study of Russian postmarks. I often saw him strolling about, always genial and loquacious, a veritable storehouse of literary history, from the Hymn of Saint Eulalie to the Ulfilas Bible. How on earth had he come to be a Falangist, and a prisoner of the Falange?

The matter was never cleared up. When I was at the Carcel Modelo of Barcelona, I had observed that a mystery attached to all Common Law prisoners. "Why am I here?" they would often ask. "I don't know, and I can't find out." We, on the other hand, knew well enough why we were there. A political prisoner never conceals the cause of his imprisonment: indeed he exploits it, to heighten his self-importance. The Common Law prisoner likes to make a mystery of himself. He bears the burden of an injured innocence; he may even boast of his misfortunes. Wolfus was merely a Falangist, a friend to the régime, a supporter of Franco, and a Catholic to boot; indeed at Mass he behaved with exaggerated devotion, crossing himself with all the fervour of a Stylite in the early ages of the Eastern Church. There, in the heart of Castile, the classic land of the Marranos, the renegades of religion, he evoked visions of the converts under Ferdinand and Isabella. They, too, no doubt, were just as frantically eager to establish their new-won orthodoxy, the multiplicity of their genuflexions, pious ejaculations, and prostrations. This same Wolfus's conversation was indeed a matter for remark, and would have utterly amazed all the other Wolfuses scattered over the surface of the globe had but an echo of it reached their ears. Our Wolfus spoke in full favour of Hitler, Mussolini, the anti-Comintern Pact, the anti-Russian Crusade, and Pierre Laval.

I never dared ask him whether he was an anti-Semite. "Yes, I know," he would often say, speaking as one learned in the law. "I know that the Fascist revolution is of course faced with difficulties. Time will be needed, and patience, and courage. But we shall overcome them. . . ."

That was why the other Israelites in the camp shunned his company. Fuchs and Ward, for instance. Fuchs was a Viennese who had manufactured hand-grenades at a profit of one mark per grenade. He had only just begun to make his profit, in actual fact, in 1938, when he was compelled to leave Vienna, and found himself at Marseilles and Algiers. One of his own grenades had burst against his stomach, so that he had no more than half a stomach left. At present he sold vegetables, fruit, lemons, and salads in hut No. 17. An excellent man of business, his prodigious memory enabled him to handle vast sums and elaborate statistics with the utmost ease. And small sums too; in the matter of vegetables, for instance, he was an expert, for—as he explained—a half stomach needs a constant supply of good green salads. He must have been very wretched without salads, but he would, on occasion, sell his salad, gloomily but firmly, for a few *pesetas*. I don't know whether the man was without a heart, but he had a stomach, though not much of one, which brought him great repute. And Fuchs would have nothing to do with Wolfus, who led a very melancholy life, and would gladly have accepted the company of a bear-leader. Nor would Ward have any dealings with Wolfus. It was a snobbish hut was No. 17.

Wolfus's most notable characteristic was his patience under adversity. He endured poverty without a murmur, and he was frightfully poor. His great resource was to mount guard in the huts at night, like *Imaginario*. Every night one of us was supposed to undertake this duty, but it was possible to evade it for payment made. There were many others willing to offer their services: and for a *douro* a man could sleep his night of duty through. One night, in my hut, by the dim flicker of a night-light, I could see in the darkness, more deeply shadowed by the throng of sleeping, snuffling bodies, Wolfus pacing up and down, enveloped in his bat-like cloak. All his garments were invariably too large for him.

I was at grips with an attack of insomnia in which, heedless of the weariness that would come with daylight, I could dream

at my ease, watch the reflections from the nightlights glimmering on the timbered walls, listen to the mice pattering between the legs of beds, guess at the dreams of the exhausted sleepers, whose faces showed up as pale blotches against the ochreous blankets. Wolfus, bespectacled, stood in a halo of light, looking for all the world like a dejected owl. "Can't you give me a fag?" he once said to me. "It's so cold . . . so very cold. I've got such a craving for a smoke." I had a packet of dry biscuits left on my tin plate. He accepted a biscuit. I insisted on his keeping the whole plateful. When he had it in his hands, he gasped out: "Is all that for me?"

It wasn't just politeness, be very sure of that. M. Wolfus, of the Febronius mission, M. Wolfus, member of the Falange, M. Wolfus, crowned by several Academies, was not the kind of person to lay himself out to be agreeable. He did not seriously believe in such a gift. The world had not been kind to him: life had been very hard. He had never known what it was to be thanked. A packet of biscuits, just like that, with nothing to pay, was a matter that passed all understanding. He devoured them with ugly, broken teeth which looked hideously like half-melted caramels. I mounted my stair once more, made two notches in a beam, and slipped into my sack. This had been a happy and a profitable dream.

I paid him a courtesy call the following week. "Please sit down," said he, pointing to his mattress. And this was a member of the Académie and of many learned societies. No sooner had I sat down than I was aware of a mutter of laughter from all parts of the room. A Dutchman opened his arms wide and made a fluttering motion of his hands, as though to simulate a hovering cloud of insects. And from every corner came the cry: "*Piojos . . . piojos*" ("Lice . . . lice"). I started to my feet in horror. Wolfus looked much put-out and promptly assumed an elaborately pedantic air. He set himself to harangue the company on the origins of the Slav languages, on the comparative literature of the School of Lyons, in order to lure me back to the mattress. The spectacle of the tattered pundit, desperately striving to present himself as a scholar and a gentleman, was ineffably ludicrous. He spoke in four languages, with the same affectation and the same facility.

In the sunshine of July, Wolfus would bare his pigeon chest at times of exercise as he strutted to and fro. He was quite

delightful on these occasions, polite, attentive, making a jerky little bow when any person of distinction passed, for all the world like a deferential seminarist. He had a particular attachment to his lice. This erudite personage objected to water, and having been so recently baptized, he had a horror of shower-baths. His affrays with his *caño*, Pefferkorn, were something to witness.

I could have wished that the potentates of Oriental scholarship could have been present at those interviews. Pefferkorn was a Viennese who had kept a souvenir shop at Palma de Majorca, where the purity of his Semitic type constrained him, in 1938, to choose between the German and the Spanish camps. He preferred Miranda. A natural gift for leadership soon brought him to the fore. He was regarded with respect by all his hut-mates both for his inborn capacity and his coolness in a crisis. Indeed he was a notable sight, at the head of his squad, issuing his orders and instructions. Never, in any army in the world, except in prison armies, did a corporal address his men with so much eloquence. In assigning the tasks of carting wood or peeling potatoes, he expressed himself in the most measured and magniloquent language. The man had a flair for rank and dignity. His one fault was over-lavish gesticulation. Every trait in him bespoke the Oriental. When he denounced Wolfus for harbouring lice, he did so with all the vigour of the prophet Isaiah. Wolfus had received orders from Pefferkorn to take a cold shower-bath, and Wolfus disliked water, especially cold water. Pefferkorn meant to impose his authority and get the hut clear of lice. He was born to command was Pefferkorn, ex-vendor of souvenirs at Palma de Majorca and native of Vienna. He intended to make himself obeyed, even by Wolfus. When sometimes of an afternoon there was a disturbance, after drinking, in the bar of Berkovitch the Bessarabian, Pefferkorn popped up like a jack-in-the-box and let fly his most sarcastic sallies, winged with every kind of Oriental imagery. He was indeed worth hearing on those occasions. Nowhere in the West, except in the ghettos, does humanity exercise so much eloquence in praise of silence, so much vehemence in appeals for peace and quiet. Pefferkorn used to take his siesta at that hour, and the noise from Berkovitch's bar had awakened him while, in the arms of Morpheus, he was savouring the delights of a well-earned rest. His plea

for the siesta was indeed a plea *pro domo*. So savage was his indignation, and so potent his authority, that no one dared utter during his Sermon on the Mount. Pefferkorn talked, and Wolfus laughed. Wolfus had earned a little money by mounting guard at night, and had bought himself three cigarettes from an old Spaniard in No. 10, who made them from discarded ends by the aid of a little paper and saliva.

CHAPTER 26

The Old Men

THEY were peasants from Castile who had been so careless as to be caught in the act of fraud or *estraperlo*. They must indeed have been unlucky to have let out the secrets of their nefarious doings, after such a long experience in the arts of faking a horse or selling a rickety mule. No doubt the younger delinquents had been rounded up into labour battalions. The old men were consigned to Miranda, just as though they had been foreign journalists, foreign airmen, Belgian, French, or English officers. There they were put into French military uniforms of the old type, tight breeches, tight tunics, caps with gold tassels like bits of curtain-fringe, in which array they indeed looked pitifully absurd, with their spindle shanks and bony chests, their gaunt visages and peaked chins. They might have the manners of aristocrats, but they begged and they pilfered, and carried on a traffic in bread. They echoed the universal cry: "*Se vende*," and produced a *chusco*, a small roll, from their noisome pockets. The bread was as dirty as their hands and tunics. "*Se vende chusco*": this cry of the prison highways will always remain in my memory, shrill, incessant, like *sobra sopa*, and *ropa sucia* (dirty linen for the wash). The ancients, as in Classic tragedies, provided the chorus for our talks and songs. There were always about forty of them, frail and decrepit, casting good and evil spells as they passed by. They were called *abuelos*, grandfathers, or—more exactly rendered—ancestors. This ancient usage still survives in the Castilian language. In Castilian an old man is an ancestor:

and thus indeed they were addressed : “ *Oiga* [listen], *Abuelo* ! ” And when they created a disturbance in their hut, a passing sergeant would shout : “ *Silencio, Abuelos* ! ” It was like an invocation to the Powers beyond the grave. The old men were housed like sardines in a box, and kept under the strictest discipline. They all had little hoards of provisions packed away in all sorts of strange receptacles, or in the pockets of their garments. They were men of the earth, upon whom long experience as goatherds had bestowed some resemblance to their own rugged beasts. Their necks and shoulders, and their sinewy forearms, suggested a goat’s neck and withers and forefeet. Take their sandals off, and I am sure that cloven hooves would have been revealed. However, their days were spent in picking up cigarette-ends, selling *chuscos*, and unravelling sacks, a universal occupation in all Spanish prisons, where the fibre is then rewoven into soles for sandals. The ancients of Miranda no longer sang *flamencos* or *jotas*, the melancholy Arab chants which have passed into the Andalusian repertory as *flamencos*, and in that of Aragon are known as *jotas*. They must have danced long ago in their villages by moonlight, or watched the girls tapping out fandangos. They had thrilled at many a *corrida*, carried statues in processions ; on festal days they had quaffed great draughts of clear cold water from pink earthenware ewers, or sour wine out of goatskins. No doubt they had duly fired a shot or two in some old civil broil. On the road to Burgos they must have met the funeral procession of Rodrigo de Vivar, the *Cid Campeador*. It is recorded that the hero’s wife, after his death, took the bones in a coffer of white wood, on muleback, from Valencia to Burgos. Often when travelling in Spain as a free man, I felt I saw once more that sad heroic vision, a black-beribboned mule, a Spaniard with shadowed eyes and cheeks gaunt with weeping, and the box, the little rustic coffer that contains so much romance. But that is the eternal Spain, which you must know well and have dreamed many a dream of, if you are to discover any vestiges of it in these dismal wretches, convicted of slaughtering calves or selling flour outside the government control.

They wore blankets over their heads, which, at Miranda, was the last word in degradation. When a man had been broken down at last by solitude, misery, wood alcohol, and privation, on days when the wind blew strong and cold, he

flung a dun-coloured blanket over his head and shoulders. He was no more than a beggar. Fifi, the Frenchman, who had lived for twenty months in these surroundings, had known many elegant and ingenuous youths who, six months later, were walking about in the icy blast muttering, "*Se vende chusco . . .*" like any swindling peasant: like, in fact, the old men of Miranda. We also had witnessed metamorphoses of this trend. But the "Ancestors" had suffered no change since their arrival in the camp. They were lined up for the ceremonies of the *Bandera*, and for the visits of inspection, in a highly nondescript platoon. It was indeed absurd to draw up these ancients in order of battle, arrayed though they were as riflemen in the campaign of liberation. They hobbled along like a company of puppets. When a colonel, Chief of Staff of the Prison Inspectorate, reviewed our preposterous Court of Miracles he hurried past these ancients, who looked sadly in need of the attentions of the Little Sisters of the Poor: and he must have winced at the sight of a glorious uniform thus degraded. It is always shameful to laugh at the old: but to dress them up in this way as caricatures of soldiers was surely more abominable still.

I must add that many of our younger inmates were callous enough to treat the ancients as though they had been mad, and laugh at them accordingly. Ah well, a lad of seventeen, who has suffered beyond the measure of his years, is not very susceptible to tragedy.

CHAPTER 27

Herr von M.

WHEN the camp was asleep, white like an Algerian village beneath the afternoon sunshine, when the population lay outstretched in linen bags to avoid the flies, when the very mongrels crept into a patch of shade, that was the time to make a call at the far end of No. 14, where five of us, all officers, had set up our mess. We too were sleeping, and among us could be seen, in profile, a very singular personage lying supine, as usual, on

his back. It was Herr von M., a German airman of Richthofen's squadron, a Junker of the 1914-1918 war. A gaunt, dry figure, abstemious and always scrupulously neat, sallow and clean-shaven, at fifty he was still, and always would be, marked for life by his Prussian military education. What fantastic fate had deposited him at Miranda? He had left Germany in 1923, and become an Argentine citizen. A Westphalian of good family, he had so loathed the Republic that he had crossed the Equator, and settled far to the south of it, under the silver stars of the Southern Cross, together with his aged mother and his sister. There he had worked in the service of an Aerial Navigation Company, as a pilot and in a position of authority. . . . At last, in 1936, the Argentine Government had hired him out to the Spanish Republicans, with a squadron under his command: so fervent was his desire to fight against the Swastika and all the demagogic Fascisms, that he, a man born to authority, warred most gallantly against the Germans. He sought them in the air, caught them, and sent them down in flames. One fine day, at two thousand feet up, he was himself caught and shot down. Two years in prison at the Carcel Modelo of Barcelona, a journey in a prisoners' train, hut No. 17—such had been his odyssey. The Argentine Government, being extremely pro-Fascist, was not in any hurry to demand his release. Herr von M., by this time emaciated and half starved, would have found himself without resources and reduced to beggary if a handful of Belgian officers had not taken it into their heads to come to his assistance by pooling their rations. Where there are five, enough can always be found for six. If, indeed, these had been times of peace, if the five of us had had an income of five hundred thousand francs, it would not have occurred to us that we should each offer twenty thousand to a companion in distress, even an Air Force colonel, simply because he happened to be destitute, and—what was worse—a German. But reduced as we all were to bare subsistence, it seemed absolutely natural for each of us to give him a fifth share of what we had. Colonel von M. talked Spanish, but not much better than the rest of us: it was more convenient to discuss matters with him in German, and he was of course a staff-officer with a specialized and intimate knowledge of espionage duties. As we possessed some small stores of under-linen and pyjamas, we were able to provide him with a few such matters, for the unhappy man was utterly

destitute. In brief, he was a member of our mess, but he ate, on his own bed, the little dishes that we concocted, and ate in silence, accepting with an impeccable ease of manner everything except wine. And he repaid us with all manner of unobtrusive little services. He would often evolve some means of dodging one of the camp regulations; and as he had been almost crippled by his final wounds, he was relieved from roll-call and guard duty, so he was able to keep watch over our stores of food. In point of fact all this would have been an extremely delicate affair, if Herr von M. had not been, as he emphatically was, an aristocrat to his finger-tips. It was this that saved the situation. He could accept small offerings in such a way that the donor was not left with the painful impression of having been dispensing charity. I had many talks with him, and listened to the stories of his campaigns. The Junker had been transformed into a *condottiere*. He had fought for pay, but he had never been able to save any of the money that he earned. The Argentine Government, his employers, had paid him: now that he could fly no more, and had to walk the earth with two sticks, having spent many an hour of torture on an operating table, his employers stopped his pay. And he, an officer and a gentleman, was too proud to ask a favour.

"My father was a cavalry officer," he said to me one day. "My mother was an officer's daughter, her maiden name was——," and he mentioned a famous Rhineland family. "My father was killed in 1914 on the Aisne. We were six children, five of us boys, all in the Services of course, and the *chiquita*, the little sister. Here is a picture of us all."

And he produced a large photograph from the depths of a pigskin suitcase. At my sight of it I could hardly believe my eyes. Here were five young Germans, slim and upstanding, all with an astonishingly martial air, grouped round a little girl as smart and trim as her five brothers. The eldest, then nineteen, wore the frock-coat and the absurdly high collar of a sub-lieutenant in the Guards. The two next were cadets in a famous military academy. Then came the sailor, in navy blue and a white collar. Then the fifth, a small boy, but uniformed like the rest. All of them except our friend had been killed at sea, on land, or in the air. The most fortunate, the sole survivor, was the airman of the Richthofen squadron, who had been stationed in the Bruges and Kortemark country and had

emigrated in the end. His dominant loyalty was to the Emperor Wilhelm II. A Germany without a Hohenzollern was, in Herr von M.'s view, Germany no more. "I went off with my mother and the *chiquita* to the Argentine," he said. "Here are their portraits."

The mother had beautiful white hair. She was a typical Teutonic matron, with a kind and homely face, the face of a submissive wife who had cheerfully endured the monotonous routine of garrison town existence. Six children had been born to her, and the five boys had been sacrificed to the monstrous German Moloch of war. She had accepted it as quite natural that all her brood had been thus sacrificed, like a litter of kittens, in the service of Imperial Germany. The last survivor, now an Argentine citizen, had merely been disabled. He, last of the nestling birds of prey, last of the five trim, up-standing young German warriors, had, as a man born to authority, become the natural leader of all the Internationals of hut No. 1. Little Rudi, the wild Saxon Communist, said to me one day with kindling eyes: "We knew that fellow well. We knew what he was like. He wasn't just an officer: he was a born leader."

Herr von M. spent his days doing our domestic errands. He was to be seen hobbling up and down the streets and alleys of the camp with that calm, superior air characteristic of the officer on half-pay;—how many of his kind must have haunted the Café Lamblin in Paris after 1815. When he came back to us, laden with crisp green salads, or a dozen new-laid eggs, he didn't think himself quit of his obligation to us, not by any means. He sat down to shell the beans, the great horse-beans known in Old Castile as *rancho*, which, thus peeled, and seasoned with a mayonnaise, made the most succulent salads. Indeed, soldier as he was and nothing else, he found entertainment in peeling beans. Then, quietly and unobtrusively, he ate his share of the succeeding meal. There was something touching in those traits of military brotherhood, and not the least singular feature of our mess was this German soldier, and as such a personal enemy of the human race, whom an evil fate had deposited at Miranda.

Then he would lie down, his head swathed in a white linen bandage, for he was acquainted with every sort of pain, even headaches. He lived, but—as it were—by accident. Death

had ejected him from her sinister array. She left him a skeleton, but with breath still in his bones. His peaked and pointed jaw, his rigid lips and cavernous nostrils, were scarcely those of a living man. Only the open eyes testified that the soul had not fled. He, like the rest of us, found his ultimate refuge and escape in sleep.

CHAPTER 28

Sleep : and Talk

MANY of us slept because they were weary of living, and sought a remedy for the sickness of their souls. Then, on awakening after a long, long sleep, they felt hungry, and made their way to the centre square, where they waited for their soup in the company of Deputies from the Palais Bourbon and Bosnian bear-leaders. Only then did they recover their hold on life and their self-confidence. The Poles would have laughed less heartily, and worked less feverishly at the tunnel in the night-time. There were not a few who had grown rather anaemic as the result of the vegetarian cell diet, and resorted to calcium injections as a stimulant, which sank them into sudden slumber after violent indulgence in food. Health returned in sleep. It could be sensed welling up from the very springs of life. Time was, at Miranda, when the veins in my arms were so scarred by old injections that the hospital orderlies could scarcely find a clean place in which to jab their syringes. The calcium, when a place was found, coursed in a hot current through the back and up into the throat. I felt it surge into my mouth, and leap into my cheeks and eyes. I laughed, and described my sensations to the astonished orderlies. Many patients fainted during the treatment. All of them felt life rushing upwards to their temples and flooding their eyeballs, though their legs remained unsteady. Our red blood corpuscles were locked in savage conflict. We used to totter out like men half intoxicated.

A prison infirmary is the place above all places where nothing can ever be found. The infirmary at Carcel Modelo was a hot-bed of international gossip, a veritable press agency, where the

chronicle of current events was manufactured, together with all manner of amateur medicaments. There was indeed a plentiful lack of everything needful there, except imagination, and that was rife, both in medicine and politics. The Miranda infirmary was of quite another kind, but just as tragic. The Spanish authorities remained wholly aloof. English, Poles, French, and Belgians had clubbed together to provide the essentials, and the Spaniards were not at all averse from leaving them to deal with such tiresome matters. So there we came for injections and for purgatives. A Polish doctor and two orderlies worked wonders in that place, without a penny of reward. It was indeed the very manifestation of Christian charity. Needless to add that the most prevalent malady was boils, the cause of which was an excess of tinned food, or not enough of any food at all. I picture them still—all those necks patterned with strips of iodine-stained plaster. At the two ritual ceremonies of the *Bandera* I found myself observing, not the crimson and gold flags, but the necks of the assembled throng. Those violet dressings were the most vivid testimony to the misery of those days. But the infirmary had other duties to perform. It was there that the new arrivals went for treatment.

The historian of this war who would lay bare certain of its mysteries must not forget the story of the Miranda infirmary:—hut No. 18. There, garbed like a chorus in a travelling opera company, came men of all ages to await their turn. From Poland they came, from Holland, Paris, Brittany, and Franche-Comté. They were poor, with shaven heads, and scarce a scrap of flesh upon their bones. Some of them had already spent five or six months in a prison cell and could make themselves understood in Spanish. Others could only stammer out—" *Se vende,*" or " *Mañana.*" These were they who had been caught crossing the mountains; they had spent at most a week or so in a country gaol, and knew nothing of the harsh, magnificent land of Spain, except in guardrooms and its philosophy. They wore no collars to disguise their stringy necks and they were arrayed in the nondescript amorphous garments affected by all nomads of the road, in which, as was plain enough, they had lain by night and walked by day. Their features were peaked and drawn, and there were shadows round their eyes. It was noteworthy, by the way, that the ritual shaving of the skull, which seems to strip a man so pitifully of his moral

integument, was least disfiguring to the already strongly-marked planes of the Polish countenance. Perhaps, too, after two years of vagabondage, they had assumed the look of what they had become. The Belgians still retained the stigmas of their professions and their rank in life. I knew police officials and men of business, staff-officers, lawyers, or mere members of that special human category which, in Paris and in Brussels, we call decent society. The two orderlies led them into their little storehouse of bottles and the boxes of antiseptics. "Pull up your sleeve." A dab of cotton-wool soaked in iodine, and the syringe slipped neatly into a vein. The prisoner smiled, or grinned, or laughed a sickly smile, or simply stood unblinking, like an ancient donkey who has endured so many blows that one more thrashing leaves him quite unmoved.

I smile as I remember the last time my head was shaved, at Saragossa, whence I emerged with a skull like a Salvation Army warrior. With what sublime indifference I underwent what to others was indeed an infliction. Old hands like ourselves did not care what happened to us, provided we were allowed to sleep, and sing. The patients of the Miranda infirmary arrived with all manner of prejudices, which were either those of prisoners of long experience, or of enlightened citizens unaccustomed to the dusk of prison life. From them we could catch the atmosphere of Paris or of Brussels. Some of them had left their capital only ten or twelve days before. They brought with them echoes of the occupied countries. They had been present at the bombing of Billancourt, they had watched troops on the move, and the invading administration at work. Many of them had become dangerously acquainted with the Luftwaffe, so dangerously that they had left in haste one fine morning, upon a discreet hint received.

CHAPTER 29

Release

FOR some time past I had been speculating about the future. What would be my first impressions as a free man? How, and with what sort of vision, should I look once more upon the

open country, where cars and carts go about as they please: the roads, the houses, the cafés, and the pavements where people stop to stare into the shop windows? Eight and a half months' confinement had disaccustomed me to the motions of liberty. The idea of an encounter with a police officer had become, and still is, something that I dread. At this very hour I do not like to feel their eyes upon me: I am nervous of what they may be going to do. The most placid of London constables, when they come a little too close, always make me feel that they are going to ask me a few polite little questions. A year of the German occupation in France, eight and a half months of various prisons—no more is needed to establish a persecution-mania in the lightest of hearts. A quick step in the shadows at my side makes me start, like a sudden, strident whistle. Did you ever, before the war, thrill with apprehension at the touch of an unknown hand in an underground train? It quite upsets me nowadays. And I never write anything in a notebook except a few harmless signs and figures. It was always an instinct of mine to take notes of all I observed—plants and animals, and anything worthy of remark. But now I find I don't care to do so: I observe everything very carefully, and note down my impressions afterwards, when I can shut a door and sit down, in solitude, like a schoolboy in detention. But what my more remote reactions might be I could not then foresee. One thing I must admit: my stomach was as inquisitive as my mind. How should I feel when confronted with a real dinner, properly laid, accompanied by a tablecloth and a napkin, where a person solely appointed to that duty awaits the moment to bring you the next course, and changes your plates and knives and forks? All of which, among civilized beings of long standing, like ourselves, was no more than an accepted social asset, like the right to be decently dressed. Finally, as this would appear to be the moment for avowals, I will add that, previous to my vagabond experiences, I was not merely a social entity, I went about a great deal in what is called society. Before the war I hated to miss a party. And now I found myself looking forward to all that sort of thing again. Would there be cocktails still, and dances, and lively luncheon-parties with good talk about books and so on? This latter question had burdened my mind for very many days. The date of my departure was notified to me one Saturday; it was to be the following Wednesday. When

my friends asked me what would be the next stage in my programme, I replied: "Before the great day when I rejoin my wife and children, I should like to dine at the Ritz in London, in a dinner-jacket and a silk shirt, having had my nails very carefully manicured. There will be flowers on the table, and silver gleaming under a little electric lamp. On either side of me there will be a pretty brown-haired girl, each wearing an orchid I shall have presented to her: and opposite me an old diplomat, who will entertain us with his reminiscences and all the talk of the great world. I shall be a little awkward at first on purpose, just to amuse my companions, who will laugh at me, but not, I think, at all unkindly. I shall tell them about the times when I wore handcuffs on my wrists. . . ."

Such were my most immediate dreams. But I was well aware that in a few weeks I should be weary of such a rose-coloured existence, and should never rest until I could plunge into the fight again, or speed along the great roads of the world, which, for us journalists, is our normal way of working, or—in other words—of life. But, during those four days, a wholly new and strange emotion gradually gained upon me, and that was—remorse. All these men whom I was going to leave behind me in the camp, who would take care of them? What were they going to think of me, *afterwards*? I knew how affectionate they could be, how generous, and I knew their solid, kindly honesty of heart. But I also knew how bitter and how jealous they could be upon occasion. Few indeed there were among them who never yielded to the promptings of envy. When melancholy took possession of their desolate hearts, they were accessible to every sort of slander, even of the most malignant kind, and these affectionate, honest, open lads were only too ready to let calumny proceed with her evil machinations. What were they going to think of me? They knew quite well that beyond the barrier, just at the point where the road forked, I should find a golden life awaiting me; a rank in the Army, and an office—that sacrosanct establishment known as an office, the indefectible symbol of every human hierarchy. I was regarded as one who had dined with Ministers, and been on familiar terms with their secretaries. I had delved so deeply into the human head and heart during these last few months. The herded society of prisons was utterly untainted by hypocrisy. I knew so well what treasures of kindness, and

of the sweetest Christian charity, lay concealed beneath the roughest exteriors. I knew, too, that after long exertions must come interludes of weakness, and that he who is to-day at the peak of popularity will to-morrow be savagely decried, for a trifle, a moment of forgetfulness, an unanswered letter.

The four days were spent in long and confidential talks with many prisoners, who each and all told his little story to this fortunate comrade, from the very outset, in all its details and ramifications. The last morning arrived, the last *Bandera*, and the last bugle-call. It was a very beautiful day, and I pictured the white dust on the roads of Castile. There was no disquiet in my mind, only an immense relief at a task at last accomplished, and one all the more burdensome in that I had not freely undertaken it. Indeed it had been a long and laborious task, without glory or heroism, but with much in the way of compensation, and endured with the gaiety that made the endurance possible. I laid against my heart the little photographs of my family, and my missal of St.-André les Bruges, so luckily saved out of the wreck. That last day of July reminded me of my last prize-giving, at the College de Saint-André, before the war of 1914, when, laden with handsome volumes, I sighed the little schoolboy's deep sigh of relief when he gets his reward for work well done.

My friends who were also due for release had had their suits cleaned and pressed, and they were wearing ties. I had no tie left, and did not see the need of one. "Haven't you got a tie?" said Commandant H. "I'll see what I can do for you. . . ." Indeed I wasn't worrying in the least. However, he brought me a beautiful light-check tie, from Severin's at Brussels. I had had myself shaved, and my hair carefully cut, but my clothes were threadbare, and my cuffs sadly frayed. God knows, I didn't care. My little confidential talks continued, and those I enjoyed the most were with people who had no request to make of me, Poles who had resigned themselves to the dreadful prospect of staying there for ever, as long as the war lasted. Let us frankly admit that the pleasantest people at such times are men of the greater world, and among the Poles there were not a few men of education. They were witty and intelligent, they had a taste for good literature, and though they might be squatting on the ground beside an open drain near

They talked very much like diplomats taking leave of each other, at the d'Orsay or Victoria stations, while waiting for the express. "Well, we shall meet again soon," said they, in the tone of calm conviction used by all citizens of the great Republic of the Civilized.

Dr. Lister, the Ukrainian, came to offer me his best wishes for my future success and happiness, and his hopes of "a better Europe." Little Wolfus, talkative and tedious as usual, and, as usual, tragically absurd, pirouetted round me, begging me to write to him: "Even a post card . . . but *do* write. A post-card is always welcome." The Russian gave me countless messages for friends in New York. Colonel von M. quite wrung my heart. Austere and smart as ever, he indeed had no request to make of me. He was a man without a country, and accustomed to living in isolation from the community of persons and events. Gaunt and emaciated, since he had ceased to be a German citizen he had nothing left but his kind heart and his aristocratic air. He laughed as he looked at me, and clapped me genially on the shoulder, just as an experienced horseman pats a young colt's neck before the start of a race. He laughed in the most charming way at seeing me so happy, and I could barely restrain myself from bursting into tears. It was indeed a very difficult moment; for my friends and I having endured our lot—as we hoped—like gentlemen, attached importance to displaying our joy in the manner prescribed by that same code. It is singular how Occidentals resemble each other when they have acquired a certain culture and been to decent schools. The human soul is everywhere the same, at all the rungs of the social ladder; and so is human suffering, but upwards from a certain grade in the hierarchy material suffering is so much easier to bear. I have often noticed how we intellectuals are not greatly distressed by hunger. We merely talk about something else.

The time of our departure was fixed for midday: but, as might have been expected, we did not actually leave until about half-past one. The British Red Cross lorry was waiting beyond the barrier. The heat was already fierce. By a fortunate coincidence, eleven Dutchmen from the International Brigade were being released at the same time. I was well acquainted with these austere Communists, with whom I generally talked only in Spanish. We passed the barrier together, and were

taken to the office for our final visit. I went in first. When I came out, one of the Dutchmen asked me, in Dutch, whether I would take charge of his prison diary. It was a parcel of exercise-books crammed with notes, a summary of fifty-two months' imprisonment. Fifty-two months of misery and horror. Exactly the length of the 1914-18 war, but devoid of glory, vengeance, or victory. When he emerged from the office and I gave him back his parcel, I had the feeling that I was handing him a cold slab of human misery, of suffering concentrated and solidified.

The sergeant of the guard shook hands with me: and I shook him by the hand without the slightest rancour. The car was waiting for us. The throng behind the barrier gave me a farewell cheer. I felt a lump in my throat: and any gesture of farewell would have been utterly out of place. I responded with a vague wave of the hand, as who should say "Thank you . . . my friends," and I shouted "We'll meet again soon," well knowing that I should meet very few of them again, and that I was uttering a last well-meaning lie.

The car started with much jarring of gears. Just as on leaving the Carcel Modelo, I had decided to take note of the first legible inscription to meet my eyes. On that occasion it was *Carniceria*, over a butcher's shop, as though by way of challenge to that herd of eight thousand human beings who never, never so much as whiffed the savour of a beef-steak. At Miranda it was much more simple. The first words that met my eyes, in large letters, painted on a house wall, were "*Se vende*." A curious country, Miranda, where even outside the camp everything was for sale, even the houses.

The released prisoners were taken to the best restaurant in the town. There were about thirty of us, sitting silent and patient at a table duly and decorously laid for lunch. For the first time we did not have to bother about our food. The Dutchmen, after fifty-two months, behaved with perfect ease. At neighbouring tables were various ladies just finishing lunch, and talking to their small daughters. All talked excellent Spanish: and not the least of our new experience was to listen to the sudden lilt of it as talked by young and charming human creatures. So Spanish could be talked by others than prisoners and soldiers? True!—I had forgotten. Those proud faces, that bright, black beribboned hair, those sun-tanned throats,

those tresses so delicately waved above the ears, those fingers playing with the fruit—all this indeed was Spain : I recognized it. And the language too. It gave me as much of a shock as though I had entered an aviary and the birds began to talk to me in the language of La Fontaine and Giraudoux.

At that same moment the camp was in a state of wild excitement. A Czech had hanged himself that morning in hut No. 6. He had been taken to the infirmary ; but the place was promptly besieged by a crowd all eager to secure a piece of the rope with which the deed was done, an article much prized by many in such circles. Adventurers all, without a remnant of religion left, they still retained a few beliefs. And this was one.

Of those interminable months I retain—and indeed it has been made a matter of reproach to me—no atom of rancour against my gaolers. Why not admit as much ? I had not even the hardihood to bear them a grudge. I had long loved Spain, having travelled the length and breadth of it, admired its harsh and splendid landscapes, its writers, and all that indefinable element that is called the soul. Chance had decreed that, admirer as I was of Cervantes, I should come to live like him, as a convict, in his very country. And there I met with, turn by turn, deeds of the purest heroism, the most touching charity, and outbreaks of the most appalling savagery. All of which served but to confirm me in my view that for the misfortunes of modern Spain there is but one remedy : the traditional monarchy. Alphonso XIII and his heirs combine with the great merit of not having shed Spanish blood, that of representing Spain in her most authentic manifestation. What a singular fate was that of the last regnant king, whose death at Lausanne in the spring of 1941 caused so much mourning in Madrid that on the day of the funeral the Falange imprisoned three hundred Royalists. It is easy to get rid of a king : it is much less easy to bring him back. My one hope is that Spain may get hers back, and that the land of St. Theresa, the Cid, and El Greco may recover that internal peace without which the splendour of art and letters never can return.

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Love One Another

Among all the Spaniards whom I knew during those months of misery, there is one upon whom I look back with quite particular affection. It was the little Carlist warder in the Fifth Gallery of the Carcel Modelo at Barcelona, he who used to sing so conscientiously of an evening: "*Por Dios, la Patria, y el Rey . . . lucharemos nosotros tambien.*"

He liked the condemned men, because by a jest or a light word, a touch of kindness, he could, before the supreme sacrifice, give them a little joy, and perhaps a glimpse of Christian charity.

My one hope, at the conclusion of this book, is that this my testimony may have brought a gleam of truth into the great drama, so that I may venture to imitate the little Royalist warder at Barcelona, and repeat to the distracted race of men the ancient Gospel precept: "Love one another."

THE END